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A THREE-PART DISSERTATION:

PROMOTING AND SELECTING CULTURALLY RELEVANT TEACHING MATERIALS
AND PEDAGOGY IN OUR SCHOOLS

STRATEGIES AND GUIDANCE IN MOTIVATING AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES TO
PATHWAYS FOR SUCCESS

ERADICATING CYBERBULLYING THROUGH THE DEVELOPMENT OF ETHNICAL
AND CLEAR POLICY AND PROCEDURES IN LEARNING COMMUNITIES

Ebony Davis
Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of
Doctor of Education
in the Foster G. McGaw Graduate School

National College of Education

National Louis University

June, 2016

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of the requirements of
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Abstract

In the twenty-first century, African American males continue to be negatively defined in society, in the media, and by educators. These males face many challenges in their educational careers. Hence, this study explored two African American male students and their perception of contributing factors that motivate them to succeed academically. The study was also focused on their perceptions of their relationship with key influencers that help them to succeed academically. The study consisted of an analysis of their perception about teacher quality, student behavior, and parental involvement. In fact, study results showed how these African American male students maintain a belief in personal responsibilities, belief in positive relationships, and have high expectations for themselves, in order to succeed in life.

Preface

African American male education should be at the forefront of every educational endeavor that truly believes in equality. These young men of color rank first in incarceration, being murdered, as well as whole host of injustices that would and should be intolerable for a just society. Yet, educational institutions remain quiet and passive on this controversial issue. The major objective for educational institutions again should be to provide all students with a quality education that will prepare them for a successful life. Many decades after the Landmark Supreme Court Case of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka (1954)*, academic success still eludes the majority of students of color in general, but African American males disproportionately. This study was designed to analyze the motivational factors of this student group and the extraneous factors that truly contribute to real, measurable academic success.

Interviews came from African American males who provided demographic profiles in order for the students to glean important perspectives and insights. This will allow the researcher to monitor, analyze, and predict factors that positively effect and influence student success.

Students who are positively motivated have a strong belief system of their individual competence. Supportive parents, peers, and a positive learning environment foster this system. Research has shown that when African American males participate in a learning environment similar to the one previously described, they produce higher test scores and better psychological profiles then when inundated with a negative environment. Most educational institutions still have not discovered this remedy, or think the results are not worth the effort.

Hence, African American male students, like any other student group, need and environment that is

1. Where cultural competency is stressed,
2. Free of negative stereotypes,
3. Filled with after school activities that engage and foster, and
4. Filled with positive role models

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PROMOTING AND SELECTING CULTURALLY RELEVANT TEACHING MATERIALS AND PEDAGOGY IN OUR SCHOOLS

SECTION ONE

Introduction

Background

The reading achievement gap between Caucasian and African American students nationwide is a problem that has been extensively documented upon (Jagers& Carroll, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2005). It is a dilemma that has garnered increased attention due to the renewed emphasis on accountability and high-stakes testing resulting from the newly adopted Common Core State Standards (2012) and NCLB (2001), legislation that identified an increasing number of African American children as at risk (Ladson-Billings, 2005). Furthermore, it is a grave and relentless problem that continues to exist today within the Milwaukee Public School (MPS) district. While educators have long stressed that “all children can learn” (Pardon, Waxman, & Rivers, 2002), helping all students learn has prompted educational leaders to focus on the instructional effectiveness of teaching practices. For teachers in large urban school districts, research in the area of student performance has shown promise when teachers consistently utilized suitable, culturally relevant materials and instructional practices to ensure that connections were

made to engage all students (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2005). The result was enhanced individual student learning.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2013), school systems in the United States are experiencing a continued decline in reading achievement and reading scores, and this decline has jeopardized the future of many school children. Research conducted by Kunjufu (1996, 2012), reveals that a major challenge to teaching reading to African American students is that of growing disconnection from academics and disengagement from learning. It is believed that the challenge of disconnection and disengagement takes place in the early grades and is significantly evident by fourth grade, a critical year for reading assessment (NWEA, 2013). This challenge of disengagement with reading places students at risk because they fail to acquire the critical reading skills needed for mastery of basic academic skills; thus creating an achievement gap. There are many other scholars who have compiled data to support the existence of this achievement gap, revealing that many children attending public schools in America are suffering underachievement at an alarming rate (Cleveland, 2011; Snow 1998).

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of a reading collection/curriculum entitled the *Collections Series* to determine how teachers in a high-poverty middle school identify and use the lived experiences of their students to support culturally relevant teaching practices using a specific curriculum. My research asked the following question: Does the *Collections Series* promote culturally relevant teaching? Related questions to be explored by this study are: How do middle school teachers in an

urban district identify students' lived experiences and use them to support culturally relevant reading instruction?

What is the Collections Series? The Collections Series is an assemblage of short stories set in historical contexts. The curriculum specifically provides opportunities for students to analyze history using fiction and non-fiction stories. It also provides opportunities teachers the opportunity to connect the lived experiences of their students to these carefully crafted works, which will then make learning and the reading curriculum culturally relevant.

To execute my research I analyzed data collected from a group of teachers from Queen Middle School (pseudonym), a high-poverty middle school in an urban public school district. Queen Middle School is one of four traditional middle schools within MPS. Prior to my research endeavors I obtained consent from both the School District and the participants.

Rationale

My rational for selecting to evaluate *The Collections Series* is due in part because my current school had been selected to participate in the pilot application of these works as part of our curriculum. This reading curriculum was developed specifically with the goal of enhancing students' awareness of the historical contributions by diverse groups and individuals throughout history, that to this day still have an impact on our current society. *The Collections Series* provides an opportunity for students to engage in higher-level critical thinking skills and engage in internal and external self-evaluation practices.

Additionally, this series affords teachers the opportunity to be culturally responsive by incorporating into the curriculum the lived experiences of their students. The connection between reading and success in school is significant and the teaching of reading with a purpose is not only fundamental to student performance but also to academic progress (Neito, 2010).

For classroom teachers to effectively make the transition from teaching theory to using culturally relevant instructional materials requires them to help their students, through their instructional practice, to see the relevance of what is being taught and how what is being taught connects to their lives. Students and teachers in individual schools and throughout the school district are shared stakeholders inasmuch as student success leads to improved school performance and school annual yearly progress (AYP). Culturally relevant teaching has been cited as an important contributing element to improved student performance (Lyman, 2011).

Focus of This Study

For the purpose of this study on culturally relevant reading instruction, *The Collections Series* was the focus of the program evaluation. The traditional middle school (Queen Middle School) that is the participating school for this study is located in a large urban community in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Ninety-two percent of the students in this target middle school are African American (DPI, 2013). Many of the students in the target middle school struggle with reading and as a result, the 2013-2014 School

Improvement Plan for this school includes a tiered approach to reading intervention for students who have been identified as reading two grade levels below their current grade level.

The Goal

The intended goal of this evaluation of *The Collections Series* is to assess the impact of this reading curriculum on student engagement and performance and to determine if the Collections Series is culturally relevant. It is noteworthy that the reading curriculum used in this evaluation is a newly developed reading series by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, (Beers, Hougen, Jago, McBride, Palmer, & Stack, 2015). *The Collections Series* for district wide adoption is due to be released in 2015.

Working Definitions

The working definitions for the purpose of this evaluation have been provided for the following terms: academic success, real life experience, lived experience, cultural competence, culturally relevant, and culturally relevant teaching.

Academic Success: relates to teachers setting high expectations for all students and developing aspirations for academic success (Billings, 2009).

Real life experience: is considered life experience as it is lived in reality and distinct from a fictional world (Oxford, 2013).

Lived experience: is personal knowledge about the world gained through personal involvement rather than through representation (Lewis-Beck, 2007).

Cultural competence: is defined as the ability to implement strategies to address and resolve racial and ethnic disparities (Betancourt et al, 2003).

Culturally relevant teaching: pertains to pedagogy and responsive instruction that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically using culturally relevant inferences to impart knowledge, skills and attitudes (Billings, 2009 p. 160).

Research Question

The primary research question I have crafted is: Does the Collections Series promote culturally relevant teaching?

Related Question

1. How do middle school teachers in an urban district identify students' lived experiences?
2. How does the identity of the students' lived experiences align with the Collections Series?

SECTION TWO

Literature Review

Historical Connection

Throughout the history of public education in American, in which minorities have had the ability to participate in the educational process, an educational gap in reading has challenged many of our schools. This gap is magnified particularly in urban schools and urban school districts in the United States who educate a significant population of students from diverse ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds. The education gap in reading has had many different names. According to Anderson (2007), this gap in reading first appeared in the 1800s, over 200 years ago. The gap then was referred to as the “literacy gap.” The gap existed then because 90% of Caucasian children were able to read, whereas 90% of African American children did not know how to read. The institution of slavery was a contributor to this phenomenon because it was against the law for an individual, who was enslaved to be taught to read. In the 20th Century the literacy gap continued but began to diminish with the passage of Emancipation Proclamation 1863 and 1865 the ending of the Civil War. These two events freed enslaved people of African descent that were part of the Civil War (Anderson, 2007) and set the stage for this group of people to lawfully gain an education and began to close the literacy gap.

The next educational gap became known as the “elementary school attendance gap” (Anderson, 2007). African American students primarily did not have schools that they could attend. The schools that were in existence during that time were essentially for Caucasian students. As time went on philanthropists became more inclined to address

the need to educate African American students and led efforts establish schools to teach them. This trend helped to further bridge the education gap between African American and Caucasian students during that time.

After The Emancipation in 1863, African Americans represented the largest percentage of uneducated people in the United States. Robert A. Margo (1990) suggested that racial differences existed in the quality and quantity of schooling as indicated by literacy and educational attainment. In the years 1863-1890, an education reform occurred that established state supported public education as a right of citizenship in the South (Anderson, 2007). African Americans of that period were free, but unable to attend schools because there were so few schools for African American students. This prompted the United States government to create the Freedman Bureau in 1865, to help people formerly enslaved adjust to their newfound freedom (Margo, 1990) and acquire schooling.

Literate African American men and women began to educate those recently freed African Americans that served in the Civil War, opening the Freedman Bureau Schools. In 1869, the Bureau schools educated approximately 200,000 individuals. By 1890, African American illiteracy stood at 61%, which was a decrease from the early 1800s (Margo, 1990). At the same time the Southern white illiteracy rate neither increased nor declined much, and this helped to close the literacy gap. Yet in spite of everything, by 1880, only 20% of school-aged African American youth attended school, which sustained the achievement gap to remain between African American and Caucasian students. Margo (1990) stated that the reason for illiteracy was that illiterate parents had lower incomes and they needed their children to work rather than attend school. However, when

African Americans were no longer required to work on the farms and started to attend school in larger numbers with regularity, only then did the literacy gap began to close significantly.

In 1989, the elementary school attendance gap (formerly called the literacy gap) became known as the black and white achievement gap (Sommer, 1983). This gap was based on Standardized test scores. African American students were not demonstrating success in reading based on data obtained from achievement tests. A Nation at Risk (Sommer, 1983) sounded a national alarm and recommendations were enacted to bridge the black and white student achievement gap. However, the reform models that were developed did not close the achievement gap between black and white students.

Once again the name for the achievement gap changed. The gap no longer was referred to as the black and white achievement gap, because now data was being considered for Hispanic American students. Hispanic American numbers were rapidly growing within the United States and in turn within public schools. Unfortunately Hispanic American students, like African American students, were not performing well in public schools either and their student achievement also lagged behind that of white students in part due to a language barrier. Nonetheless, as the 21st Century with all of its technological and educational advances approached, the educational achievement gap continued and became known as a digital divide. The age-old problem and gap in academic achievement of students of color, particularly African American students, persists and the gap in achievement is now reflected in the Annual Yearly Performance (AYP) of schools.

Theoretical Framework

According to an article, which appeared in the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel (2013), there continues to be a growing struggle with African American students throughout the United States in the area of literature. Much of the disconnect stems from the lack of knowledge of teachers concerning the students' culture and the lack of opportunity within classroom instruction to allow the students to use their lived experiences in the everyday learning process. A core belief of Ladson-Billings (2009) and Gay (2010) is that the use of culturally relevant pedagogy helps to increase the literacy of students because teachers are more culturally responsive to what matters to their students and are able to engage students in the learning process by connecting the curriculum to their experiences.

This study drew from the theory of culturally relevant pedagogy as advocated by Ladson-Billings. Ladson-Billings (2009) asserts that when students' culture is an integral part of the learning process student learning is enhanced. She emphasizes the teachers' responsibility for preparing the learning environment while reinforcing how important a student's culture is in the learning process. Ladson-Billings feels that a child is the center of the learning process and that the teacher is considered the facilitator of the learning process. Resistance to learning takes place when the student's culture is not reinforced.

Ladson-Billings (2009) supports the value of cultural relevance in teaching. This can be seen by Ladson-Billings emphasis on prior experiences shaping the teaching style of countless numbers of teachers as it relates to educating African American children and was fundamental to the framework of justifying this study. The researcher conducting this study is a proponent of student-centered instruction and believes there is value in

embracing the cultural differences in general and is confident that student achievement can be improved based on the way teachers engage and serve African American children in public school settings.

The Education Trust (2013) reported that only 12% of African American fourth graders nationally have reached proficient or advanced levels on the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) while 61% have not even achieved basic competency levels. The report further highlights that, as a student ages that the trend continued with 66% of African American students that are in the eighth grade not achieving basic competency (The Education Trust, 2013). The Education Trust also documented that many African American students, upon completion of high school have the reading skills equivalent of European American eighth grade students. Sean Cavanagh stated that students who struggle in middle school grade 5th – 8th are more likely to drop out of high school (2009, p.37).

Over 50 years ago, researchers began to identify sources of the achievement gap between European Americans and African Americans. It was in the 1960s and 1970s that the deficit theory prevailed as the school of (Murrell, 2008). The prevailing school of thought was anchored by the belief that because African American students were being raised in a state of cultural and financial deprivation, therefore they entered school at a disadvantage regarding academics. As time continued, yet another deficit model gave way to another school of thought. Murrell (2008) referred to this as the teacher quality and school effectiveness movement (p.11). The movement had been characterized by sociological perspective. It involved analyzing the interactions between the school, home, and community (The Education Trust, 2013). Remnants of this theoretical perspective

can still be seen today through the culturally relevant pedagogical movement (Ladson-Billings, 2009).

Tatum (2009) discussed the disenfranchisement of African American students in education calls for a redefined descriptor for mastery and success, which claims reading as a more than descript set of skills (p.25), and that placing statistical data at the center of literacy reform efforts is a mistake (p.24). Tatum's work supports best teaching practices. He extended those to include a teacher's understanding of the turmoil that African American students have experienced both historically and individually and the impact that it has on their literacy development. Tatum stresses the need for culturally relevant text that will provide opportunities for students to connect with characters and conflicts that will increase their desire to read.

Culturally Relevant Literature

Culturally and linguistically diverse students are not receiving a free and appropriate education when teachers are not implementing instructional strategies that optimize student achievement or positively reinforce their cultural identity.

The idea of culturally relevant pedagogy is rooted in the theoretical occupants of the Vygotskian Theory (Murrell, 2012). The socio-cultural linguistic theories of culturally relevant pedagogy focused on the ability of students to construct meaning from other students, texts, experiences, and themselves within the context of the classroom. Within an every changing heterogeneous society, the need for understanding cultural concepts now exists. Teachers must frame instruction with the understanding of the students that they are servicing and that the basic levels of literacy provide a foundation for all knowledge acquisition (Murrell, 2012). Through the development of cultural

relevance in literature, students are able to move into other realms such as mathematical knowledge, scientific knowledge, and political knowledge (Tilbury, 2011). Fundamental to this understanding is the basic explanation of Vygotskian theory for the cultural shifts that should be occurring through children in today's classrooms. The shifts result from generational socialization and should be passed in the home from parent to child, and through the media and its influences on the lives of children (Hwa-Froelich & Vigil, 2004).

As for the theoretical construct of cultural relevant pedagogy, that is defined by many researchers as using affective methods to meet the academic and social needs of culturally diverse students in the classroom (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Murrell, 2012; Tatum, 2009), the advocates that use the culturally relevant literature strategy offer a possible intervention for the challenges faced by African American students. Ladson-Billings (2009) stressed the importance of the teachers' knowledge of content, understanding of the learner, and the teachers' knowledge to deliver the content to the learners. Through cultural relevant pedagogy, Ladson-Billings and Gay emphasized the ability to maximize learning for racially and ethnically diverse student populations. Ladson-Billings revealed the need for African American students' to consciously choose academic success, rather than having it forced on them as a result of European values. The fundamental elements of Ladson-Billings theory included:

- A teacher's ability to develop students academically by drawing on ideas and issues that students view as meaningful

- A teacher's ability to nurture and support cultural competence at home and school by utilizing the student's culture as a vehicle of learning
- A teacher's ability to develop a sense of critical consciousness through open study and discussion anchored by topics of social injustice and inequality

Ladson-Billings (2009) provided the framework for any culturally relevant pedagogical approach to teaching by emphasizing the need for more than accommodations to language, teaching style, and passive acceptance. Moreover, the researcher challenges teachers to look deeply into the dynamics of the historical, social, and cultural relationships that affect the learning process. Gay (2010) cites the importance of cultural relevance in the classroom and outlines benefits to instructional practice by stating that incorporating, "the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students make learning more relevant to and effective for the students. It teaches to and through strengths of these students. It is culturally validating and affirming (p.29)." When the students have their culture validated, they feel a sense of respect and an improved sense of self-worth. These feelings then facilitate the students' ability to make connections from the text to their world, which is fundamental to reading success (Freeman & Freeman, 2012).

The key components of any culturally relevant program also includes multicultural literature, cooperative learning groups, phonics, and concerned and caring teachers who are culturally aware and sensitive to students' needs (Perkins & Cooter, 2005). Perkins (2005) reiterated the importance of student experience being incorporated

into instruction, further validating the importance of literature that is culturally relevant to African American, as well as other minority populations.

According to Sims-Bishop (2012), authentic texts depicting real world experiences and culturally accurate traditions for African American children were more preferable than material that did not. Since reading involves making connections, the material students read must be filled with accurate depictions to which they can relate. Important too are the speech patterns and dialect of the characters. Real world experiences and accurate depictions to traditions are pieces that should be addressed by literature, which makes them culturally relevant and thereby facilitates meta-cognition. Bishop also concluded that students who fail to see and experience their own culture in the literature they read; tend to not view themselves as valuable and emphasized the connection between literature, awareness, and self-esteem.

Pardon, Waxman, and Rivera (2009) cited benefits of cultural relevance. These scholars included, but were not limited to, the improvement of knowledge acquisition and retention with an increased appreciation of diversity and cultural orientation other than the student's own. Through the use of culturally relevant literature, students can build on their strengths using their prior knowledge and the learning experiences, which are common to their culture (Pardon, Waxman, & Rivera, 2009). Rich conversations can then be added to the classroom community through the well-crafted literature selections allowing students to connect their prior knowledge to what they are currently reading. Through the active exchange of ideas in discussion groups, interest is built and engagement improves (Gay, 2010).

Conclusion

To summarize, bridging or closing the reading achievement gap for all students is a process. Many researchers have revealed that this is not a simple problem to solve. It is a condition, which has developed overtime. Just as there is no single cause, there is no single solution to this problem. The data gathered from the teachers along with the subsequent findings based on the literature reveal one possible intervention. Through the use of culturally relevant literature, an increased interest by students can result and impact the students' motivation to read, and yield improvements in their overall academic performance.

The ability to be able to deal effectively with student differences is crucial to teaching literature. Teachers must be able to address the needs for culturally relevant teaching of students in their classroom. The traditional methods of literature instruction are now being challenged and teachers are being challenged to adapt and to evolve in their instructional practice to connect with the ever-changing young student population. The current methods of reading instruction once considered to be very effective, were based on mostly on European American paradigms. The ethnic and economic demographics of public school populations have since changed. Therefore, teachers are challenged to find innovative techniques that reflect the needs of diverse student populations for culturally relevant literature. Culturally relevant teaching offers many opportunities and brings exciting changes to the traditional curriculum. Overall, culturally congruent instruction provides an educationally compatible avenue for all students to benefit and excel.

SECTION THREE: METHOD

Research Design Overview

The site of this study is a traditional middle school, located in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. It has a student population of about 465 students, all of who qualify for free or reduced lunch. African-American students account for 96% of the student population, followed by Asian- American students who comprise 3%, and Caucasian students who comprise the remaining 1%. The target school did not achieve AYP status for the 2012-2013 academic school year. Recently, the school has undergone a change of administration as well as, a high turnover among classroom. This represents a turnover of 50% of teachers on staff.

This study looked at qualitative data, as well as quantitative data. The research design and framework will support the collection of data that not only will be analyzed but will also be used to gain additional insight into how participating teachers view and understand culturally relevant literature and integrate the lived experiences of their students into the curriculum to enhance instruction and learning.

Participants

The study took place at Queen Middle School in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The participants in this study are teachers that are piloting *The Collections Series* reading curriculum in their classrooms. The participating teachers in this study include veteran teachers as well as first year teachers to the MPS district. Additionally, some of the participating teachers in this study also teach special education. Each grade level at the target school consists of three classes teaching the same curriculum, (regular education,

special education, and support teacher). There will be nine teachers that will be participating in this study

Data Gathering Techniques

The nine teachers participating in this study will comprise three focus groups. Information gathered in the focus group will pertain to cultural relevance and teachers understanding of culturally relevant teaching instruction. In addition to data collected in focus group sessions –teachers, will maintain a reflective journal throughout the duration of the study as part of the research design. The goal, to evaluate *The Collections Series* will determine if the reading curriculum has cultural relevance.

The group will determine the setting and meeting time for the focus group and a calendar will be distributed and reminders issued in advance of session meetings. Appropriate measures will be taken to protect the participants' rights (issues of confidentiality, informed consent, protection from harm). Any questions asked by participants during meetings will be answered and any concerns expressed by the participants will be immediately addressed. Prior to conclusion of each focus group meeting, follow up meeting dates will be confirmed. Individual review of participants' journals will be scheduled at the convenience of the participating teachers.

Reflective journals kept by participants will enable them to record self-evaluative reflections throughout the duration of the study. This will allow participating teachers to provide anecdotal data related to the study and make visible the growth, gains and/or improvement opportunities (born out of frustration) encountered during implementation of the Collections Series. This reflective journal will only be shared with the researcher. It will be left to the discretion of participants if they feel as though they would like to

share their reflections with others in the study group. The journals will be an activity required as part of the study and each participant will be expected to make weekly entries documenting their reflections their journals. Any journal entries or conclusions based on journal entries will be used only with the consent of participants and for the sole purpose of supporting or substantiating study findings.

This research will be a qualitative study combining information from three focus group interviews, as well as teacher journals. According to Anderson (2003) there are five characteristics of qualitative research: (1) it takes place in a natural, not contrived setting; (2) it uses multiple methods that are interactive; (3) it focuses on context; (4) it is emergent and evolving; and (5) it is fundamentally interpretive. This research does not meet all those criteria, primarily because it does not take place in a natural setting, but instead is contrived in that the focus group interviews call on teachers to step out of their normal day duties and give thoughts to answer open-ended questions. Likewise, the teachers' journaling activity takes place in a planned, or contrived, space, not necessarily the ordinary space of a classroom setting.

However, despite not possessing all the qualities of qualitative research, the data gathered in this study does meet several of these criteria. The methods will be interactive, requiring creative input from participants. The questions, both in the focus groups and guided reflection for teacher journaling, will provide the context for participating middle school teachers' classes by placing the focus on teachers helping students to make connections of cultural relevance to the literature. David Morgan cities as a "hallmark of focus groups" their "explicit use of interaction to produce data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in a group" (p.2).

Data Analysis Techniques

Qualitative research relies on data collection methods such as observation, interviewing, review of documents and other artifacts, focus group interviews, and questionnaires or surveys (Creswell, 2008; Marshall & Rossman, 2009). Other methods of data collection may also be used. The two methods of data collection that will be used in this research are a teacher journaling and focus group interviews. The researcher is interested in answering the following research questions: Does the Collections Series promote culturally relevant teaching? If so, how do middle school teachers in an urban district identify students' lived experiences and how do they align with the Collections Series? Subsequently, the practices and understandings of a small number of middle school teachers are being sought. It is therefore determined that the most efficient way of getting responses to essential questions designed to address key issues are through open-ended questions that will focus the reflective journaling activity and grounded focus group interviews.

In summary, the participants of this study consist of nine teachers, in three grade categories 6th, 7th, and 8th which will participate in a total of 6 focus group sessions and 6 guided reflection journaling activities. Each of the participants met the criteria that was established, I purposely did not use race, gender, sexual orientation, disability, language, and religion in the selection of the teachers, with the intent to allow the study to be enhanced by different perspectives.

The first method that will be used for data collection will be the focus group sessions. Focus group sessions have been used for many decades in marketing research, and more recently in health professions and the social sciences (Marshall & Rossman, 2009). They are considered to be useful for getting a wide range of views, providing participants are forthcoming in the discussion. Focus groups are conducted in a social atmosphere, which is a more natural setting for discussion than the more formal space of an individual interview. There is greater flexibility in pursuing topics that arise that may add both depth and breadth to the data that is being gathered.

Focus groups are also useful because the cost is relatively low, they provide valuable data in a quick manner, and the results have high face validity. That is, “because the method is readily understood the findings appear believable” (Marshall & Rossman, 2009, p. 114). Focus groups are small groups, typically ranging from four to ten people, who are interviewed as a group (Morgan, 2010). The interviewer asks detailed questions to elicit group discussion that can reveal more insights into the group of people being interviewed in the case, middle school teachers. It is a proven fact that people are social creatures who often rely on the social construct to engage in and expand their thoughts, and the focus group format builds on that reality.

Morgan (2010) listed three ways that focus groups are used in educational research: (1) as a self-contained source of data collection; (2) as a supplementary source of data collection; and (3) as part of research utilizing multi-method approach to data collection. In the first instance, as a self-contained source of data the researcher analyzes for his/her study. In the second instance, as a supplementary source of data, in which focus groups can be used either before or after other sources, but mainly contribute to the

primary source. Using focus groups, as part of multi-method approach to data gathering, as well as an equal value basis with other data collections methods has been found to be an appropriate use of this data collection tool. The multi-method data collection is the approach used with the focus group in this study.

One of the advantages of the focus group sessions is the ability to gather in-depth data in a short amount of time by interviewing more than one person at a given time. Also, the social format of the interview is conducive to building a relaxed atmosphere in the interview and allowing great flexibility in pursuing topics as they arise in the discussion. Disadvantages include the possibility of an overbearing person in the group aggressively dominating the conversation. A skilled interviewer will neutralize the potential situation and steer the conversation to facilitate the collection of input by all. It is the researcher's opinion that all the participants have the ability to speak freely and share their opinions openly; therefore there will not be any problems with any single participants or group dominating the conversation.

Also, it is a known fact, that there may be a possibility of unproductive and irrelevant discussions, which can detract from the focus group interview and need to be avoided as well (Morgan, 2010). Again, it is the researcher's responsibility to make sure those discussions are focused and relevant. The questions asked of the focus group interviewees are included in Appendix A. The focus group interviews will be recorded (based on the consent of the group) and later transcribed. Although the transcribing of recorded interviews can be more problematic because there may be several speakers to track and in-group conversations often one speaker could overlap another. This could make the use of audio recording of sessions more viable alternative (again with the

consent of the group), and alleviate some of the difficulty and time needed for audio transcription.

Teacher Journals

The second method of data that will be used for data collection is a teacher's journal activity. This journaling activity will rely on the honest self-reporting of the teachers. It will allow the teachers to reflect on the different stories that their students are reading and analyze if it is culturally relevant and can build on the students lived experience. As well as, explain in their own words how they define culturally relevance, and what makes the story culturally relevant. It will also identify what the teachers learned about the Collections Series and how they are planning to use the new knowledge in their classroom and while picking out new literature to help enhance the stories and make it more relevant to the students, that they are servicing. Also, what other resources they will need in order to make their classroom library more culturally relevant.

The journaling activity will allow the teachers that are apart of this study to deeper analyze their own strengths with dealing with the different literature readings and the relative accuracy of the history collections. As well as identify some weaknesses of the Collections Series, as far as getting an important representation of the cultural competence and real life experience.

The questions designed for this research project will ask 5 open-ended questions that will allow them to analyze and evaluate the different literature activities. These questions will be picked at random for each grade level to answer in their teachers' journal. There will also be at least two demographics questions that will be required

personally for identifying background information about the teachers, but will only be general information to be used in analyzing the data.

SECTION FOUR: FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of a reading collections/curriculum and to determine how teachers in a high-poverty middle school identify and use the lived experiences of their students to support culturally relevant teaching practices using a specific curriculum. A further purpose of this study was to investigate if the collections curriculum promoted culturally relevant teaching (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009) in their classroom instruction. The theoretical foundation for this study was culturally relevant teaching which is identified as the practice of teaching minority students in such a way that capitalizes on their strengths instead of playing to their weakness (Gay, 2010; Ladson- Billings, 2009). Such an approach emphasizes, among other things, high expectations, and cultural relevance, and empowering students.

This research study was built on data gathered from two sources in one Southeastern Wisconsin District: three focus group interviews, each consisting of three middle school teachers who volunteered to participate and reflective teachers' journal, which consist of open-ended questions. These data sources were complementary and resulted in much in much information that was analyzed, categorized and finally resulted in the themes discussed below.

Data Analysis

For purposes of this study, a qualitative analysis (Creswell, 2008; Marshall & Rossman, 2009) was applied to analyze the data collected from the focus group interviews and the reflective journals. Data analysis is the process of systematically

reading and searching the collected data, in this case the focus group transcripts and reflective journals, to discover emerging themes. The process of data analysis is not a linear process, but instead follows a spiral, circular, and often circuitous path. The data is read and reread, side trails are followed looking for emerging categories. It is a complicated, and often messy, and sometimes a confusing process.

Using the responses and transcripts from the focus group interviews and reflective journals responses, the process of analyzing the data began with identifying patterns, categories, and themes of the data (Creswell, 2014; Strauss & Corbin, 2008). This process required the researcher to read the data repeatedly, inductively coding the focus group transcripts and journal results. Pertinent words, phrases, and sentences were written and coded in the margins. Once the process of the open coding was complete, axial coding was conducted (Creswell, 2014), in order to focus more on the significant words and phrases, reading word for word, line by line to see what themes emerged. Specifically in this study, axial coding involved generating categories and searching for possible relationships among the categories and across the data. It required the researcher to redefine and rename the codes as new data was developed. As the patterns continued to emerge, the researcher scrutinized the data more closely through selective coding to determine what middle school teachers do to promote cultural relevance in the Collections Series and if these practices reflect best practices in literature. Also, the data was scrutinized to determine whether or not the literature series, identified lived experiences of the students and was being implemented by the participants. Throughout the data analysis process, the transcription responses were reviewed and theoretical were

made using a constant comparison method in order to note what properties were comparatively the same and which properties were different (Strauss & Corbin, 2014).

It is important to note that the initial coding of the responses to the teachers reflective journal was done without reference to the major categories listed as apart of best practices movements (Morrow & Gambrell, 2011) for this research study. The researcher was interested in letting the data speak for itself, without trying to fit the data into preconceived categories. The initial coding resulted in 18 different codes (see Appendix C). The nineteen codes proved to be too many to easily analyze: therefore, another round of coding was done to combine like categories. Codes were created, blended, or eliminated as the data was read and re-read (Glenn, 2006).

From the data analysis, six themes emerged and it was only then that a comparison between the themes arrived at independently and those of the major categories of the best practices movement were examined (Morrow & Gambrell, 2011). This comparison is discussed within each of the themes below. In addition, some of the best practices were mentioned very little or not at all, giving the researcher some reason for concern about the practices of this group of teachers. Some of these glaring gaps are discussed in Section five.

Thematic Support

To understand the literacy strategies, methods and materials that middle school teachers use most frequent with promoting culturally relevant teaching within the Collection Series and if the identity of the students align with the Collection Series (Morrow & Gambrell, 2011), the following three themes emerged from the data: (a) variety in reading instruction, (b) mixed knowledge based for culturally relevant

teaching, and (c) teacher freedom to explore the curriculum. Each of these themes relates in some way to one or more of the research questions for this study. The primary research question is answered in part by each of the first three themes. The first sub-question is answered by the third theme, while the second sub-question is answered by the first and second theme. As a result, it is necessary to revisit the three research questions that guided this study.

Results: Culturally Relevant Teaching

In response to the first research questions, *Does the Collections Series promote culturally relevant teaching*, data analysis consistently found that two themes emerged to show what middle school teachers actually do in their classrooms to teach culturally relevance to minority students. The three themes are (1) variety in reading instruction; (2) teacher freedom to explore the curriculum; (3) mixed knowledge base for culturally relevant teaching.

As will be discussed, the results strategies and materials used do not, on a whole, reflect culturally relevance. Several specific programs were mentioned including (not limited to) Accelerated Reader. Instructional materials mentioned included trade books, leveled readers, and district-supplied reading series. It is equally instructive to note what was not mentioned. Multicultural literature was mentioned only a total of five times in the focus group and once in the teachers reflective journal. Ways of make connections to the students lived experiences were not mentioned, despite a specific question on the topic for the focus group.

Variety in reading instruction. From data analysis, a wide variety of reading instruction was mentioned frequently in both the focus group interviews and teacher

reflective journaling. Reading materials were said to be used for both independent reading selections and teaching purposes. In the questions about lived experiences, and variety of reading materials being used and available was mentioned six times. Included in the comments were trade books, non-fictions, and multicultural books. Overall the focus group interviews included more than 50 responses that referred to having a variety of reading texts available for students and used by teachers. Other texts mentioned in the focus group interviews were e-books, leveled books, library books, and district selected reading series.

In addition to the number of references to a variety of reading texts, strategies for teaching reading while enhancing cultural relevance were mentioned. In the focus group interviews about making connections to the students' lives, the teachers mentioned that they attempt daily, in many reading opportunities.

Some of the stories within the Collection Series aligned well with helping align with cultural relevance and the lived experiences of the students. One participant stated, "We make connections with the students lived experience by analyzing who Frederick Douglass was. We allow the students to read a short letter that he wrote before reading and we try to help the students make connections to him. The activity is very interesting for us as teachers because it allows us to see different viewpoints of the student." Most importantly the students are allowed to discuss their lived experience while using Frederick Douglass as the key point of the discussion.

Teacher freedom to explore the curriculum. Teachers enjoy the fact that before planning the lessons that they will teach, that they have the opportunity to read up on the different authors and story details. To be specific, only 23 times did the

participants cite the importance of having that ability to explore, perhaps to focus more on what would be more important for the student to learn, when dealing with culturally relevance. Although another explanation for this is lack of comparable variety is the teachers' lack of expertise on the subject matter. This possibility is supported by findings of Ladson-Billing (2009) and Gay (2010). Annie and Brenda (pseudonym), two sixth grade teachers who were interviewed for the focus group stated that it was difficult to discuss real lived experiences with African American students, because they think the students feel that they cannot relate to them. They feel as though the students as well as themselves, would not have an open mind to what may be said.

However some of the participants shared useful insight about the freedom to explore the curriculum. Toni and seventh grade teachers shared an informed plan for bringing students culture into the story that would be read and how to include the students lived experiences in the classroom, starting with an essential question and then using the responses as teachable moments to include the students lived experiences (Ladson-Billings, 2009). She also stated that she uses photos and music to capture the student's culture and discuss current events that happening in the world when dealing with African Americans. Michelle, a eighth grade teacher, responded quite positively also explaining that she likes that her team is allowed to bounce ideas off of each other, in order to discuss culturally relevant teaching. She stated that she attempt to be more creative and allow the students to discuss things that bothering them when they preview the story that they are getting ready to read. As for Abby a seventh grade teacher, feels that even though she has the freedom to explore the curriculum, that it is difficult because she is not comfortable enough to relate the lived experiences to the students that she is

servicing. This is a disheartening response from a seventh grade teacher who works with African American children.

On a more positive note regarding having the freedom to explore the curriculum, Donna, an eighth grade teacher, stated that in her class she allows the students to research the background of the authors. She stated that the students are in groups and they discuss the different aspects and characteristics of who they are reading about and that she goes out of her way to make sure that she reads up on the important of emerging culture into her class. She want her students to also have the freedom to explore the curriculum and to feel comfortable enough discussing issues that they may have with people that is not like them.

Mixed knowledge base for culturally relevant teaching Table 2 *Projection Data From the National Employment Matrix*

Table 2 *Projection Data From the National Employment Matrix*

. A third theme that emerged from the focus group was a mixed knowledge base for culturally relevant teaching. From the data about their understanding of culturally relevant teaching, 6 teachers mentioned that they feel being able embrace their students in culture is important, but that they really do not understand the concept of culturally relevant teaching. Whereas, 3 teachers stated that it is all about being able to teach the whole child and to make connections to their everyday lives, present and past (Ladson-Billings, 2009). This whole concept have culturally relevant teaching was mention about 40 times across the focus group interviews and reflective journaling activity.

One of the participants stated that she does not want to seem over powering. She stated that she does allow the students to listen to different African American music for

the first 10 minutes of class and then they have a discussion about the lyrics. She stated that she allows her students to teach her about their culture and that they seem to be more receptive to her for doing so.

Results: Mixed Knowledge Base for Culturally Relevant Teaching

The first research sub-question asked: *How do middle school teachers in an urban district identify students' lived experiences?* The researcher was interested in finding the answer to this question to see if the information in the first three themes were infused with culturally relevant teaching. That is, were those practices used in conjunction with CRT? Since CRT is crucial for the success of minority students (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Gay, 2010) is it practiced along with the Collection Series best practices, or has the emphasis on best practices virtually eliminated CRT from the classroom environment? The analysis of the data consistently showed the results were mixed.

Both the focus group interviews and journaling questions had the same specific questions regarding knowledge of culturally relevant teaching: *What is your understanding of culturally relevant teaching?* These questions were designed to explore the participants' understanding of what it takes to effectively teach minority students. Before exploring this theme further, it might be useful to review the definition of culturally relevant teaching adapted to this research: *culturally relevant teaching is a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, attitude, makes learning encounters more relevant to and effective for minority students, and that teaches to the highest standards.* This definition is a combination of the themes of culturally relevant teaching

proposed by Ladson-Billings (2009) and Gay (2010). There are in this definition some key ideas to look for in determining the level of understanding of the participants: empowering students, using cultural referents, making learning encounters relevant and effective, and teaching to the highest standards.

It is important to know that at the outset, according to the data analysis of the journaling and focus group interview, 4 out of 10 participants did not answer the question about culturally relevant teaching, while the additional 6 indicated the meaning of what culturally relevant teaching consisted of. This means that 40% of those that participated did not know about the topic or could care less of the topic. In addition to the non-responses, there were several comments that reflected a lack of understanding of the topic: “I have received training culturally/disadvantage children.” “Black History.” Those are some of the responses that were not added to the 40% of the non-responses. This could indicate a real weakness in a majority minority district that might need to be addressed at the district level.

Of those who did respond to the questions, a first glance at the responses showed that two terms that frequently came up: students (or children) and culture. Three participants (30% of the focus group interviews) mentioned students or children in their responses, indicating, at the least, that they understand the need to focus on the students’ needs over the teacher’s comfort level. Only one participant seemed to indicate and empowering of students: “encouraging pride in and respecting” the students’ culture. However, making learning encounters relevant to students fared better, with the remainder of the two participants (20%) indicating this was important. A comment in this vein was that “The teacher is knowledgeable about what is important to the students

that she/he teaches. The activities/lessons that are incorporated with the Collections Series, incorporate cultural (social, economic, racial) aspects that the students can relate to. Five participants (50%) mentioned culture in some form in the responses, indicating that there is some understanding of culture. As mentioned earlier, some of the participants recognized that culture includes more than the “heroes and holidays” approaches to multicultural education that can trivialize different cultures while trying to honor them. Unfortunately, there were a few participants who had similar responses indicating an understanding of what culture entails. Of course, the question did not ask “what is culture?” so that maybe a weakness of the wording of the question. One cannot be sure that all participants believe as the above teacher does that culture goes beyond the obviously seen aspects of the holidays, food, dress, and famous people, and instead entails an incorporating of the basic beliefs held by the mainstream and other cultures, comparing and analyzing events from differing perspectives, and includes discussions on racism, sexism, and social justice among many more items. The use of using multicultural books was mentioned seven times in this response (and four times in relations to other questions) which seems a low number considering the focus on the focus group interviews and journaling questions was about the Collections Series and its aim on lived experiences and teaching minority students than using multicultural literature.

According to the data analysis of the teacher journaling activity, there was an evident confusion about this term and its application to teaching. Tammy, Lucy, and Amy all responded with comments that indicated an understanding of CRT as incorporating a need to understand the environment from which the students come from,

whether they are of different races, lower social economic status, or some other characteristic. Jamie responded with an indication that the culture at large, and its impact on children, was to be considered. Two teachers, Barbara and Deborah, had no response other than to say that they both thought they ought to know something about it because they had taken courses on multicultural education. A second on the same general topic was asked of the participants: *How would you personally define cultural relevance? What is your understanding of culturally relevant teaching?* This question was asked to ascertain whether the teachers participating engaged in culturally relevant teaching, even if they could not define the practice. In response to these questions, Tammy stated that it was necessary to build up a lot of background knowledge in minority students, so that was kind of different, while Amy said that she is not sure, because she doesn't look at her students as being minority, but as students/children with certain skills that they needed to know for the next grade level. Barbara agreed, stating that, "I focus on their academic needs more than their culture." This notion of being colorblindness treats race as an irrelevant, invisible, and taboo topic' (Howard, 2006). By ignoring the race of their students' skin, Amy and Barbara, and the many others espouse the same, and are erasing crucial components of their students' identities. Deborah disagreed with Amy and Barbara, stating that things definitely needed to be done differently, including building background knowledge and encouraging more frequently and profusely of getting to know the students that they service.

Overall, it appears that the answer to this question is a split. About half of the teachers seem to understand what culturally relevant teaching is while half do not understand. If half of the students in a class did not understand the topic after it was first

taught, then perhaps the topic would have to be revisited. Given the percentage of teachers' not really understanding culturally relevant teaching/pedagogy, the researcher would consider this an overall weakness of the cooperating district, especially since well over half of the students within the district are minorities.

Result: Teacher Freedom to Explore the Curriculum

The second research sub-question asked: *How does the identity of the students lived experiences align with the collections series?* Findings from the data showed that some of the stories that are a part of the Collections Series, does align with the lived experiences. Yet, teachers also have the freedom to explore the curriculum in order, to find stories that would meet the Common Core State Standards and the mandated skills that have to be taught. 40% of the teachers stated that there are many choices that they have to teach from other sources, in order to help enhance the lived experiences of the students that the service. This implies, then, that teachers have at least partial freedom to choose materials that would meet their students' needs. The freedom could be an encouraging sign, however, the themes already discussed showed that teachers adhere closely to the curriculum, and that many of them do not possess the knowledge base to utilize their freedom to the maximum benefit of their minority students. In addition to the question, the teachers stated that they use many classroom strategies and materials to utilize some insight into the question. There were a wide variety of books cited as being used within their grade level, showing again the freedom that they have to enhance the curriculum.

One of the questions that was mentioned in the journaling activity results (not in these exact words) was "making connections to the lives of their students"; two others

were “bring the students culture into everyday subject matters,” and “having students engaged in many authentic readings throughout the day.” Furthermore, in the question about the five important things you do, some of the responses reflected what is happening in the students’ everyday environment and the things that the teachers see on the news and read in the newspaper. The responses to the journaling activity questions about how teachers understand culturally relevant teaching in their classrooms to teach reading, provides some insight into their everyday operation of their class. However, some of the answers to the questions were very vague, confusing, and some of the answer were unclear. The question about allowing students to use real life experiences in their daily learning, revealed mostly confusion about different teaching strategies. Some of the teachers responses mentioned very little or not at all on how they use the students lived experiences or how they validate identities and values. Overall, then, the researcher concludes that most teachers adhere to the curriculums setup, while some do not. Based on the 80% of respondents who answered the question about the five most important things you do to make your literature lesson more culturally relevant, and their comments (see Table 1) it seems fair to state that the majority of teachers adhere to the curriculums layout.

Table 1: Teacher Comments

The Five Most Important Things You Do To Make Your Literature Lesson More Culturally Relevant

Be Positive, patient, and encouraging

Daily Reading

Trade books

Discuss what is happening in the world

Play cultural music

Multicultural books

Read the author's profile

The freedom teachers indicated they have can help them especially in enhancing culturally relevant teaching within their literature class, in order to meet the need of the students that they are servicing. Teacher freedom is not one of the strategies that was developed within the research, but the idea of the freedom to explore the curriculum implies that teachers should have the flexibility and freedom they need in order to make the literature lessons culturally relevant for the students. Although not mentioned directly in the questions from which this theme was drawn, or the responses, it is also a critical component of culturally responsive teaching. The freedom to choose materials and strategies to meet your students' needs is important for all teachers (Pressley, 2005).

Summary

This research used a focus group interview and teacher journaling activity to collect data regarding typical middle school teachers with regard to cultural relevance in literature. Also investigated was teacher knowledge regarding culturally relevant

teaching. The data analysis was conducted using a three level process of open, axial, and selective coding. The initial 10 codes resulting from the first round of coding are listed in Appendix C.

From the journal activity and the three focus group interviews, the process of data analysis determined three themes. These three themes were discussed in detail above, and where they intersected with the literature that was introduced. These three themes showed that most teachers in the collaborating school adhere to at least some of the literacy devices that were suggested to bring about culturally relevance in literature. Additionally, teachers reported having a great deal of freedom in exploring the curriculum and choosing the different strategies for teaching. However, that freedom may not be used frequently to address the need of the minority students, as data also revealed that half of the teachers were unfamiliar with the basic tenets of culturally relevant teaching. Judgment and recommendations will be discussed in detailed in Chapter Five.

SECTION FIVE: JUDGMENT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

Secondary education has always places a strong emphasis on the teaching of literature. This emphasis in the recent decade has been increased as schools, districts, and states adopted policies that reflect the results and beliefs of the National Reading Panel (2013), Reading First (NCLB, 2001) and the Common Core State Standards movement (2013). This has created an environment in which secondary reading education is subject to federal, state, and district mandates that may or may not be helpful in teaching literacy skills to minority students (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009). However, reconciling the NRP results and literacy with culturally relevant teaching is challenging. So the question becomes, can teachers effectively teach literacy skills to minority students?

Problem Statement and Purpose. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of a reading collection/curriculum entitled the *Collections Series* to determine how teachers in a high-poverty middle school identify and use the lived experiences of their students to support culturally relevant teaching practices using a specific curriculum. The researcher strived to answer the following question: Does the *Collections Series* promote culturally relevant teaching? Related questions to be explored by this study are: How do middle school teachers in an urban district identify students' lived experiences and use them to support culturally relevant reading instruction? Therefore, this research was designed to determine if typical middle school teachers in an urban district in southeastern Milwaukee teach literacy skills to minority students in a manner consistent with culturally responsive pedagogy.

The theoretical framework for this study was culturally relevant pedagogy (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009). This is an appropriate theoretical lens through which to view literacy practices of secondary teachers because of the increasing diversity of students. The increasing diversity of students is in direct contrast to the stabilized nature of the teaching force, wherein 83% of all teachers (nationwide) are White females (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). Culturally relevant pedagogy emphasizes the need to work within the strengths and cultural background that students bring to the classroom, instead of working from a cultural deprivation standpoint (Gay, 2010). The working definition of cultural relevant pedagogy used in this paper is: academic success, real life experience, lived experience, cultural competence, culturally relevant, and culturally relevant teaching. This definition is a blending of the definitions proposed by Ladson-Billings (2009) and Gay (2010). The salient features of the culturally relevant teaching are empowering students, using cultural referents, making learning encounters relevant, and teaching to the highest standards. The increasing diversity of students means that culturally relevant teaching is becoming a more important framework to adopt in the classroom. The cooperating district has 93% of its students identified as minority (MPS, 2014), increasing the importance of investigating literacy practices in this arena through a culturally relevant lens.

In this section, the researcher provides a brief overview of the data collection methods used, followed by a discussion of the judgment that emerged from this research including a brief presentation of the themes that were discovered. The researcher then presents other recommendations from the data analysis. After this discussion the

researcher presents conclusions that can be drawn from this research. Finally, the researcher will close with concluding remarks.

Data Collection and Analysis

The research involved a teacher's journaling activity and three focus group interviews. The journaling activity was open for three weeks and was shared with the researcher. Of the ten teachers that choose to participate, all ten responded to the questions and all choose to share. However, only 80% of the teacher choose to share all or the majority of the responses to the questions. All of the ten teachers participated positively in the focus group interviews.

The results of these data sources were analyzed using principles of grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 2008). Open, axial, and selective coding were utilized to determine prevalent themes in the data. The researcher looked first for relevant codes that could be detected in the journaling activity and focus group interviews. After this initial reading of the data, a second reading was done with an emphasis on identifying codes that were similar enough to be combined. This process resulted in ten codes that were used to further read and analyze the data (see Appendix C). With these ten codes in mind, another reading of the data was done, looking for thoughts and ideas that might have been overlooked. The 10 codes that were developed proved to be too many to analyze easily, thus leading the researcher to look for codes that could be combines under the same thematic headings. This process is illustrated in Figure 1 below. The results of this process were the three themes that were identified and discussed in section four. A summary of each of those resultant themes is presented below.

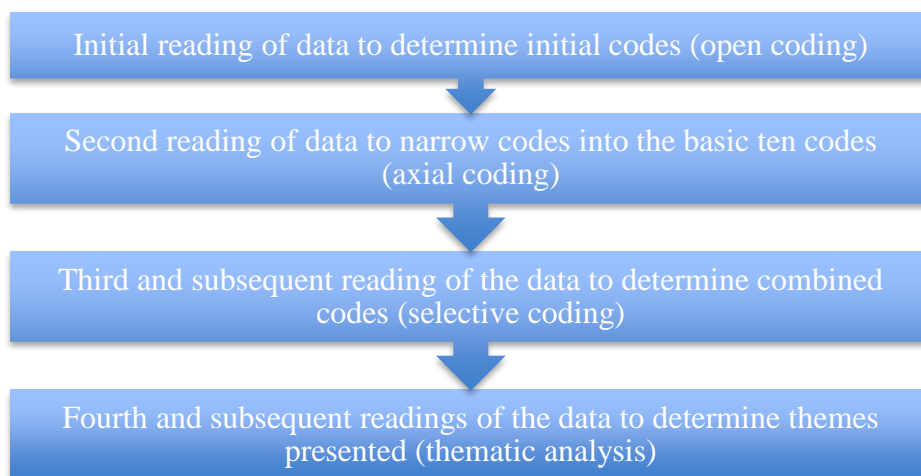


Figure 1. The coding process: data was read repeatedly, continually looking for ideas that may have been overlooked or that could shed further light on the themes being developed, especially in the third and fourth steps of the process.

Discussion of Judgments

The researcher read about classroom practices of culturally relevant teaching of middle school teachers with regards of literacy (Allington, 2011; Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009). The data analysis revealed three themes that showed that secondary teachers in southeastern Milwaukee district closely to some tenets of the theory, but many teachers do not have the knowledge base to enact culturally relevant teaching. The results also showed that teachers have a great freedom in their choice of readings and methods for teaching literacy skills. The three themes were (1) variety in reading instruction; (2) mixed knowledge base for culturally relevant teaching; and (3) teacher freedom. These themes are presented in Table 1 in relation to the research question each theme answered.

Table 2

*Themes Presented by Research***Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Research question	Themes
Does the Collections Series promote culturally relevant teaching?	Mixed knowledge base for relevant teaching
How do middle school teachers in an Urban district identify students' living Experiences?	Teacher freedom
How does the identity of the students' Lived experiences align with the Collections series?	Variety in reading instruction

These three themes will be discussed briefly, with special emphasis being placed on the relation between the themes and both the Collections Series and culturally relevant teaching.

Mixed knowledge base for culturally relevant teaching. An interesting finding in this research was the theme of a mixed knowledge base for culturally relevant teaching. Considering the fact that the cooperating district is a majority minority district, the researcher was surprised to find that half of the teachers in that cooperating school had a limited or non-existent knowledge of culturally relevant teaching. In fact, 40% of the responding teachers either did not answer the question or had an answer that indicated a limited knowledge. In addition to non-answers, there were a large number of irrelevant answers such as “I’m taking that course at UWM” and “I have received training in teaching culturally disadvantaged through the years.” As well as, “I read the book by Ruby Payne.” These irrelevant answers raise the percentage of the non-answers to just

about half (50%) of the participants indicating a weak or nonexistent knowledge of CRT. Of those that did include more responsive answers, most indicated a need to consider the background, needs, and experiences of the students being taught. As one teacher said “CRT is making a conscious effort to relate learning to the home/community environment whenever it will help students better, and more effectively, learn required curriculum.” The importance of teachers making a “conscious effort” to meet students where they are was echoed by other participants:

I don not assume all of my students understand what I am asking them to do. I try to see if they have prior knowledge on the topic and take it from there. I am conscious of the different cultures in my class. It is important to involve the families and make them comfortable learning.

Unfortunately, with half the responding teachers not understanding culturally relevant teaching, it is likely that the students are not receiving the best education that they could, had they more knowledgeable teachers. This premise found support in the focus group interviews, where the same question was asked. However, the focus group interviews also had a question about what they do to teach minority students. This question was for the purpose of determining if teachers were engaging in culturally relevant teaching even if they could not articulate what it means. The answers, or non-answers, showed again that more than half of the teachers interviewed did not understand CRT. This is a sad state of affairs in a majority district that should be addressed at a district level. Ideas for addressing this imbalance of knowledge are found under recommendations.

Teacher freedom. This finding was encouraging in that it showed that the teachers have a great deal of freedom in selecting the methods and strategies they use in their classrooms. This freedom is tempered with the need to adhere to the Common Core State Standard (CCSS, 2013), but many teachers mentioned that they had freedom within

the CCSS. The freedom the teachers have is also tempered by the knowledge that half of them do not have the understanding necessary to use that freedom to the best advantage of their minority students. Teachers overwhelmingly reported some or complete freedom from mandates, indicating that there is significant flexibility for teachers to meet the needs of their students. Increasing the percentage of teachers who understand and can implement culturally relevant teaching would make the freedom already present more beneficial to their students. For example, “providing students with access and exposure to high-quality literature across a range of genres” can only be done if teachers have the freedom to choose the literature they want to expose their classes to, literature that is able to draw on the cultural backgrounds and evident needs of the class.

Variety in reading instruction. Teachers that responded to the teacher journaling or focus group interviews valued variety in both texts and strategies used in literature. Trade books, multicultural books, and non-fiction books, and the district adopted literature series were all mentioned as being apart of the variety of literature chosen. A variety in literature choices for both instructional and independent reading is important to maintaining motivation and interest in reading (Guthrie, 2011).

Variety in reading texts is a key component in having students engaged in many authentic readings throughout the day, including self-selected, independent reading and will provide students with access and exposure to high quality literature across a range of genres. This shows that some of the teachers are utilizing some of the literacy strategies to help emerge culturally relevant teaching in their daily literature. However, multicultural books were mentioned only a couple of times in the focus group interviews, showing that perhaps the reading instruction that is taking place is not necessarily

culturally relevant teaching (Souton-Manning, 2009). While not a magic wand to ensure that culturally responsive pedagogy is occurring, the use of multicultural literature would likely be an indicator of some sensitivity to minority students' differing needs. As Gay states, "Literature....is a powerful medium through which students can confront social injustices, visualize racial inequities, find solutions to personal and political problems, and vicariously experience the issues, emotions, thoughts, and lives of people otherwise inaccessible to them." (2010).

Conclusions

There are several conclusions that can be drawn from this program evaluation. First, there is a definite lack of understanding about what culturally relevant pedagogy is and how to implement it into the classroom in the school under the study. As both Gay (2010) and Ladson-Billings (2009) state many times, using culturally responsive pedagogy to teaching minority students is more likely to result in positive outcomes for minority students. Furthermore, because of the significant of the teachers in this school do not understand, and do not use culturally relevant pedagogy, it is important to tell from this study if successfully melding culturally relevant pedagogy is realistic.

Secondly, many teachers although given significant amount of freedom to choose strategies to teach to their students in a culturally responsive fashion, instead tend to stick with the dictates of the literature curriculum. It is encouraging that a fair amount of freedom is experienced by these middle school teachers, but discouraging that they do not know how to use the freedom to the advantage of their minority students. Given the degree of ignorance about culturally responsive teaching shown through the teaching journaling and focus group interviews in this program evaluation, it is not surprising that

the teachers do not use their freedom to teach in a culturally responsive manner. Nonetheless, the facet that the freedom exists holds hope for a future where more informed teachers would make better choices for their minority students.

Third, middle school teachers' value using a variety of literature to teach literacy skills. This showed up plainly in the focus group interviews. It correlates with the guidelines of "providing student with access and exposure to high-quality literature across a range of genres." Unfortunately, the use of multicultural literature was not emphasized in the focus group interviews, occurring only eight times in the focus group interviews. The use of multicultural literature is not an indication that culturally relevant teaching is occurring. However, the more multicultural literature being used, the greater the likelihood the it is (Gay, 2010).

Recommendations

There are several steps this researcher recommends as a result of this research. These suggestions are targeted towards the participating school, but may be reasonable suggestions for similar schools to consider. In considering what recommendations to make, the researcher remained ever aware that the participating school was not adequately represented by the participants in either the teachers' journaling or the focus group interviews, thus there may exist pockets in the school, particularly in the non-participating schools, where these recommendations would not be appropriate.

The cooperating school should develop a focus group just on teachers' knowledge of culturally responsive pedagogy to determine the need for further professional development in this area, and what weaknesses need to be addressed. The weakness of knowledge in this area, considering that the district under study is 93% minority, should

be a red flag to all those concerned about minority students in the district achieving at rates comparable to their white peers. As a result of the suggested research, the participating district should then design and implement a professional development series on culturally responsive teaching and have principals recommend teachers for the course, and/or teacher self-select themselves for the course. This should be a simple task to accomplish if the district can partner with one or two universities with teacher educational programs. That the participating district has these resources to draw on should enable it to meet for further education in the area of culturally responsive teaching.

Finally, the participating school should hold training sessions on best practices in literacy and how teachers can use their relative freedom in selecting different literature materials to make choices that reflect culturally relevant pedagogy. This training would be most beneficial to teachers who engage in the proposed district-wide training on culturally relevant teaching. These teachers then would have the tools necessary to integrate culturally relevant teaching, being able to engage and teach both minority and mainstream students in their classrooms. These teachers would likely become better teachers of literacy, and follow-up studies should be done to see if this is true. If the training provided impacted classroom teaching positively, these teachers can then become mentors to other teachers who need help in integrating philosophical frameworks into one method of teaching.

Implications

The learning gap between black and white students persists in spite of the use of best practices. This can be seen in the scores for the Wisconsin Knowledge Concepts

Examinations (WKCE). These scores show that in the cooperating district three times as many black students did not meet the minimum standard as white students (10% compared to 3%). The same gap exists at the other end of the spectrum, where 20% black students exceeded on the test, while 60% of white students exceeded. This difference may in part be contributed to the lack of culturally relevant teaching, but these is not enough evidence from this study to support that as a solid conclusion.

It is necessary that white teachers recognize and admit to themselves that they have benefited from being white, while colleagues who are not white, and our non-white students, have had to or will face obstacles the likes of which they cannot not understand, as being a black educator. This inner work is necessary for the outer work of being responsive to the needs of minority students to be effective. Two of the teachers in the focus group interviews claimed a color-blindness towards their students that effectively erased or dismissed a crucial part of their students' identities. This idea of color-blindness is not the way of the future, but instead we need to acknowledge and work with the many facets of the children we teach (Gay, 2010).

Concluding Remarks

Studying culturally relevant pedagogy and literature was a challenging task. Whether these competing philosophies can be integrated to improve literacy outcomes for minority students is a legitimate concern, especially considering that culturally relevant teaching is the driving force behind much of literacy instruction today. The two topics were looked at individually in the focus group interview and the teacher journaling activity conducted and then conclusions were drawn as to the likelihood that such integration is occurring. There was little evidence for such integration, and furthermore,

it was disheartening to discover the depth of ignorance regarding culturally responsive pedagogy in a district where more than three-quarters of its students are minorities. This lack of understanding of minority students' unique educational needs may contribute to the persistent black/white achievement gap. Meanwhile, it was encouraging that teachers indicated they have some freedom to choose materials that reflect their students' needs instead of having everything mandated. But, although this is indeed an encouraging fact, it was discouraging to note that there was a lack of understanding, again particularly of culturally responsive pedagogy, that would enable them to make wise and useful choices. Despite the fact that the majority of the teachers who responded to the focus group interviews and journaling activity indicated a close adherence to the standards culturally relevant teaching. The end result showed that teachers need more professional development in culturally responsive pedagogy.

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PART TWO

PROMOTING AND SELECTING CULTURALLY RELEVANT TEACHING MATERIALS AND PEDAGOGY IN OUR SCHOOLS

SECTION ONE

Introduction

Background

Public education has historically served democratic societies in their efforts to ensure educational and social justice. At a time when education is critical to preparing the highly skilled workers required in the emerging global economy, it is vital that all students be prepared for the world of work and higher education. Given such an economic imperative, it is disconcerting that in America, the public education system is not working for all students; this failure threatens the economic and social well-being of the country. Of particular concern is the achievement gap, which refers to the disparity between performances of groups of students using several scientific measures.

Some groups, based on ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic statuses are known to underperform academically when compared to their peers in different groups and subgroups of students. The term subgroup refers to one ethnic or racial group of individuals standing as a separate entity from other racial and ethnic groups that exist in the American educational system (Bell, 2005; Cokely, 2006; Hilliard, Perry, & Steele, 2003). The gaps in achievement between subgroups, represents a national affliction that has existed since the nineteenth century and therefore presents a formidable challenge to

educators and policymakers alike. The achievement gap is an affliction brought upon schools by many factors, a few of which are racism, institutional and family challenges, socioeconomic challenges, and a lack of opportunity many students may experience in society.

Despite decades of working to correct the ills of today's educational system, the achievement gap has expanded and perpetuated itself within the lives of minority students. A disproportionate number of failing schools are predominantly comprised of a population demographic of poor and ethnic minority students (Finkel, 2010; Sherman & Grogan, 2003). By the time students who attend deprived elementary and middle schools reach high school, the academic challenges they face will now have compounded by years of substandard education.

To rectify this, national school reform efforts have introduced a wide array of intervention programs aimed at closing this gap. It is troubling that so little is known about these programs or about the factors that cause discrepancies in academic achievement between specific groups of minority students and their non-minority peers. Of particular interest are the factors that do not allow some African American male students to succeed in conjunction with the many challenges set before them in society, has an overall impact on their performance in the public education system. In order to address this lack of understanding, it is critical to learn more about the factors and programs that hold the most promise for African American students.

There is no dispute that no singular race has received more negative attention than African American males, when it comes to academic success. The lack of academic success among African American males is one of the most reviewed topics in educational

research (Bell, 2005; Cokely, 2006; Hilliard, Perry, and Steele, 2003). Data shows that a learning gap exists, as early as kindergarten and continues to grow throughout intermediate school-age years (Carpenter, Ramirez, & Severn, 2006; Desimone & Long, 2010). Evidence further shows that the gap continues to increase, the longer that the students stays in school. This is truly indicative of a systematic failure to educate African American males within our educational system (Finkel, 2010; Sherman & Grogan, 2003). Noguera (2003, 2009) identified that the achievement gap is a “public education in crisis.” He also reveals that the achievement gap is not a new phenomenon, and can be considered as a historical epidemic. Throughout the years, African American males reading achievement has fallen below that of their non- African American peers. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), raised major awareness of the academic inequalities and challenges in the world of education, faced by African American males. It identified indicators of poor performances that in past were not measured or assessed. Before NCLB was implemented, the accountability by the educational system for their contribution to the achievement gap was significantly lacking (Irving & Hudley, 2005). According to Finkel (2010), the gaps in achievement between African American males and their counterparts will continue as long as there remains a gap in opportunity. The correlation between the achievement gap and the opportunity gap exists between middle and affluent class students and those who are not. The gap prevents African American males from receiving equivalent access to high-quality education within a system that marginalizes their needs.

According to Jones and Nelson-LeGall (2009), after having a conversation with African American males about the topic of the education system, the African American

males stated that the educational system “was not meant for us.” Many researchers have inferred that students often feel they are subjected to low teacher quality, low expectations of achievement, and limited role models that look like them (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Long, Monoi, Harper, Knoblauch & Murphy, 2009). During a prior study of African American males, the males stated that a lack of encouragement was provided in the educational setting, which deems them not to feel successful (Bell, 2005; Cokely, 2006; Hilliard, Perry, & Steele, 2003).

In order to address the gap utilizing the research that exists with regards to truly understanding how to best serve the African American male subgroup, we see a critical need to learn more about the factors and programs that hold the most promise for African American males. The researcher believes that educational and social justice forms the foundation and root of everything for which educators should strive professionally. In order to render a scholarly study of the achievement gap and its impact upon the aforementioned subgroup, the researcher strove to prevent her own personal philosophy from impacting the study. Through deeper research into this dilemma it was found that a great leader in American equality shared similar sentiments as the researcher several decades before this work began. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (as cited in Wolchover, 2011) stated,

There is nothing more dangerous than to build a society with a large segment of people in that society who feel that they have no stake in it, who feel that they have nothing to lose. People, who have a stake in their society, protect that society, but when they don't have it, they unconsciously want to destroy it. (p.1)

Historical Background

Professional educators must all believe that each student is entitled to receive the very best educational opportunity, to experience powerful teaching and learning, in order to have a stake in society. In doing so, educators protect and work to preserve American society. W.E.B DuBois, American sociologist (1868-1963), historian, civil rights activist, and the first African American to earn a doctorate degree, stated the will of the African American community over 100 years ago and addressed to the annual national meeting of the Niagara Movement (DuBois, 1906). He urged that all children become educated and called on the national government to step in and wipe out illiteracy. He went on to say, “Either the United States will destroy ignorance or ignorance will destroy the United States” (p.1). DuBois also stated that education is the development of power and ideals, and Americans should fight to train all children as intelligent human beings. He asserted that “any proposal to educate Black boy and girls simply as servants and underlings, or simply for the use of other people” (DuBois, 1906, p.1) is inherently wrong. He said that all students “have a right to know, to think, to aspire” (DuBois, 1906, p.1).

As an educator and one of the founders of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, (NAACP) DuBois (1906) insisted on the provision of civil rights through education. He felt that the provision would be achieved as African Americans received increased political representation through the work of the emerging African American intellectual elite, which he dubbed the “Talented Tenth.” This great American believed in the power of education and its impact as a societal equalizer. Therefore in 1900, education was widely considered the key to success for the African

American male, and proves significantly important to this subgroup in today's ever-emerging global society (Lewis, 2001).

In a statement by President Barack Obama during the Proclamation of the National Charter School Week 2011, President Obama eloquently tied together the words and beliefs of DuBois and King. He stated that education is everything to Americans' future and America's students will not compete for good jobs with only American children, but also with children from all over the world. Over the span of 111 years, these three revered American men of the same race-, DuBois, King, and Obama, were stating all the same thing; education for everyone is not only important for the students who receive it, but also for the country that provides it (Obama, 2011).

Students should be able to reach their goals or have the opportunity to reach their goals regardless of their social status or educational standing during the course of their academic career. If educators consistently put students first and ensure that all students are in an optimal learning environment to achieve their potential, professional educators can fulfill the vision outlined by Horace Mann, the great American educator and first national public school advocate; "Education....beyond all other devices of human origin, is a great equalizer of conditions of men" (Mann, 1848, n.p.).

Statement of Problem

The various factors that have caused the achievement gap have impacted generations of African American males and have caused them to struggle both academically and socially verifying more steps must be taken to correct this wrong. President Abraham Lincoln once said that, "The two most fundamental values that have mobilized Americans were the pursuit of liberty and equality." (Phillips, 1992). This is

an issue of liberty; if an American student does not receive a proper education, he/she is never truly free or equal within American society. Due to this, the researcher firmly believes that studies like this will mobilize American educators to correct the ills of the achievement gap and thus ensure that the pursuit of liberty and equality is not just a dream, but also a reality for African American students.

To date, African American males are not graduating from high school and postsecondary school at the same rate as African American females. In order to change that tradition, African American males need positive experiences with a learning environment that offers them continuous engagement in the academic arena. Schools across America spend money, invest in programs, sponsor workshops, offer teacher incentives, and raise accountability standards in efforts to improve the academic achievement of all students. However, we must focus the current educational trajectory for African American males. In today's economy, it is imperative for African American males to have the opportunity to effectively earn a high school diploma in order to pursue post-secondary skills, which will enhance their opportunities for obtaining favorable employment in a competitive market.

Most African American male students claim obtaining an education is important to them and is a determining factor on how successful they will be in life. Alternatively, some African American males report that they do not put forth much effort in school, which results in low academic achievement (Joseph, 2000). The obstacles that African American males experience are persistent and further complicated by factors that affect them prior to middle school and high school. Regardless, it is crucial for the educational

community to examine the discrepancy between African American males and females in order to close the achievement gap (Ford, 2008).

Within this study the achievement gap focuses on reading. Reading ability data among African American males will be evaluated in comparison to non- African American males within the same school. The traditional middle school (Queen Middle School) that is the participating school for this study is located in a large urban community in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Ninety-two percent of the students in this target middle school are African American (WI DPI, 2014). Many of the African American male students in the school are not demonstrating levels of motivation that will lead to academic achievement. A great deal of statistics underscores the persistence of academic underachievement of many African American males. The data of the National Center for Education Statistics, reveals that a majority of African American males in grades eighth- and 12th did not reach grade level proficiency in the key subjects of mathematics, reading, and history. In addition, to the National Center for Education Statistics (2015), less than one-quarter of African American male students were at or above grade level in those same subject areas. Furthermore, there are fewer than 5% of African American males performing at the advanced levels in these areas, which would make them eligible for some of the Gifted and Talented programs, which are important for education (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015).

Rationale

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001(NCLB) required states, school districts, and schools to ensure all students are proficient in grade-level math and reading by 2014. To achieve this it called for educators to implement different strategies to improve

student achievement. With the constant use of research based and student specific instructional strategies, students become aware of the factors which either affects them negatively positively stimulate achievement in the classroom, and how they can increase their overall engagement in the learning process. They also are able to understand the reasons or goals of the teaching and learning experience, which underlines their involvement or non-involvement activities. Consequently, every school system is rated based on Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), which is derived from the students' academic performance. The perceived lack of effort and creativity in improving the environment and educational experiences of African American males could be detrimental to the student personally and the school system as a whole. Therefore with safeguards in place the source of ineffectiveness never should be due to the educators' lack of understanding or training in how to reach African American male population.

In this change plan, the researcher provided data and information, which helped the reader understand the nature of a problem in order to get involved, thereby allowing human beings to more effectively control their environment, as suggested by Patton (2014). School leaders who are targeting students for additional assistance in preparing for state examinations or meeting promotion requirements could benefit by understanding the many external factors, which impact African American students' academic achievements. Identifying specific factors would narrow the focus for specific students; therefore, money would be saved and spent on the targeted students within the sub-group rather than the whole sub-group. This change plan will provide educators a tool to enhance their practice and as motivation for reflecting on the educational experiences of all African American male students.

Personal Connection

My family has always valued education. Growing up in the South during a time when so many African Americans could not read made my family value reading even more. It was difficult and often impossible for many African Americans to get schooling, they had to define instead to make a living. Often, their only work was in the fields so there was not much time to spend on learning and reading.

I was born into a very large family, both on my paternal and maternal side. My parents were born in the South, where getting an education was extremely hard for African Americans and Cherokees. My father was born in Utica, Mississippi in the 1940s. He is considered to be a mixed breed of African American and Cherokee. His father, my grandfather, had 21 children and all of those children were expected to get an education. Learning to read was the number one priority! My grandfather had extremely high expectations for his children. All of them had to go to school, and walked several miles each way to do so. Many other children in their community did not have this opportunity to learn to read.

The story is told that my grandmother read the Bible to her children daily and after reading my grandfather would quiz them all to make sure they understood what she read to them. Of course, my paternal grandparents were not proficient readers, but they did the best they could with what they had been taught.

My father was one of the youngest children, so he had it a little better than his siblings. Still, the expectations were high and he rose academically to exceed those expectations and graduated from high school with honors, while his older siblings completed the sixth grade. My father had to walk ten miles to and from school. It did not

matter about the weather; he was up by four o'clock in the morning to work in the field and by six o'clock each day he was walking to school. He often said the most commonly taught subjects were reading and mathematics, with reading being most important. He would say, "If you didn't know how to read well, you would never make it out of the South and the white folks would call you a dumb nigger and attempt to cheat you out of things. But, when you knew how to read they gave you a little more respect. Being a Davis had benefits. Many people wouldn't bother you if you were a Davis."

My mother was born in Pine Bluff, Arkansas in the 1950s. She was also considered to be a mix of African American, Cherokee, and White. Her paternal grandmother (my great grandmother) was a product of slavery. My great-great grandmother was a full-blooded Cherokee who was enslaved. During that time in our history, color was used to divide the races. Among slaves who were mixed, if their skin color was lighter, often they received better treatment. Opportunities for those who were a darker skin tones were slim to none. For those who were light (almost white) their skin color afforded those many benefits. Several aunts in my family were thought to be Caucasian and if you mistook them to be white, they didn't waste any time trying to make the correction. They took advantage of the opportunities that came with being mistaken for Caucasian. My great-grandmother was an educated woman who read very well. All of her children earned a college degree. My mother and her siblings also read extremely well. They all graduated from high school and went on to receive training that allowed them each to make a good living.

Reading Mattered

Fortunately for me, reading was something that has always been a part of my life because my family valued it and that value was passed down to us. However, I did not always excel at reading nor did I feel confident reading aloud in the classroom. When I was eight years old, I remember my parents reading the Bible to me each night and quizzing me. When my father would read to me, he would also explain many things about the Bible and as a child, what he explained seemed so confusing. I just did not understand. Now that I am older, I realize that listening to my parents read the books of the Bible has given me a deeper understanding of how to connect the lessons of those stories to my life. They were relevant when I reflect back on how those stories and lessons related to situations in my life, I realize that the daily habit started by my parents not only had a major impact on my reading habits, but also taught me how to make a connection to whatever I read.

While my parents spent their early years in the South, it was their search for opportunities for advancement, which drove them to migrate to the North. They wanted to make a better living for themselves and for their family. Milwaukee was one of several Northern cities on the migration trail. As African Americans moved in large numbers from the South, their willingness to work hard opened many doors. Milwaukee provided many job opportunities for those who were not afraid of hard work. They found jobs in hotels and restaurants, and with companies like AO Smith, Miller Brewery, Briggs and Stratton, and the railroad, just to name a few. The Milwaukee Area Technical College (MATC) was a great training ground for people looking to learn a trade and many people took up barbering. The Milwaukee County

Hospital provided lots of job opportunities in housekeeping and grounds maintenance as well.

Growing Up in the Midwest

I was born and raised in Milwaukee. My Southern experiences grew from summer visits with relatives and participation in annual family reunions. My early education started at St. Rita's Catholic School. When I moved to the public school system I was in the fourth grade. It was a very difficult time for African American children in Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS). Many children because of integration had to travel across town by bus from their neighborhood school, to sit in separate classrooms, to integrate schools once populated only by whites. While the physical integration of schools was legislated, the integration of public schools did nothing to open people hearts. A number of white students and many white teachers were slow to accept African American students in their schools. The public school environment became a battleground and students of color spent a significant amount of time being transported across town.

School Integration: The Challenge to Public Education

While it may be a faulty assumption, the perceptions of people shape their reality. I personally have come to assume that how someone treats me tells if they care about me. For many years the population of educators in MPS and across many states were largely white females, many of whom had limited to no experience working with individuals of color. So while it may be my opinion facts would support the assumption that many white, female educators had limited instruction focusing on culturally relevant teaching in

their teacher preparation programs to guide them in their teaching and instruction of African American children.

Some teachers instinctively know how to connect with their students in ways, which promote learning. I distinctly recall the example set by one teacher, Ms. Fisher. Ms. Fisher, like so many early classroom teachers, told students to read the assignment and answer the questions. This instructional approach, which may have proven to be effective at some point in time with one population of students, was no longer effective with the Generation X student populations in many public school classrooms today. The challenge for teachers to relate to these students particularly, diverse student populations, were especially great. Compounding the challenge to make the curriculum relevant to the experiences of African American students was the challenge of establishing and maintaining classroom discipline to establish a safe, nurturing, learning environment, to enhance instruction for all students.

I personally observed how challenging it was for educators to make the curriculum culturally relevant. I remember being a first grade student at St. Rita's and having Ms. Fisher as my teacher. I did not perform well in first grade. I could read, but I questioned everything that Ms. Fisher had to say and was therefore, considered a disruptive student. During teacher-parent conferences, Ms. Fisher told my parents that she could not recommend I be promoted. Labeling me as disruptive implied I was not mature enough to handle the move to the second grade. Since I refused to do the work that was assigned, the teacher assumed I had a reading problem. I fell behind academically to meet the teacher's low expectations. I lost my curiosity for learning and my enthusiasm for reading. I believed the low expectations my teacher held concerning

my abilities. I felt as though I could not do it (I could not read) and therefore I could not succeed, even though in reality I knew I could. It just goes to show how much student success depends upon the opinion or expectations teachers have of individual students and their ability. There is power in expectations. We (students) think we can because they (teachers) think we can, and therefore we can, and we do.

Reflecting back, I now realize that between first grade and middle school, much of my school experience is a blur. I went to school but I was only going through the motions, not really engaged and excited about learning. A significant turning point changed my life as a student and gave me the drive needed to excel. It was shortly after my encounter with an exceptional teacher who genuinely encouraged me that I became motivated and wanted to do well academically. Her confidence in me was contagious. It strengthened both my self-esteem and my self-confidence. As time passed, more and more teachers informed me that I was a good reader and that I comprehended well too. It was that additional positive reinforcement that fueled my excitement for learning.

Teachers Really Do Make a Difference

There were two other teachers among all those I encountered during my public school education who stood out and will remain an integral memory. They are Ms. Jones and Mrs. Collier. These two women, middle school teachers, had a profound impact on my student development, school performance and growth academically. They helped to shape my understanding of what it means to be a culturally relevant teacher. As professional educators and teachers of literature, these women made reading exciting for me. The reading material they provided and the presentation of literature was not only relevant to me personally, it was relevant to the lived experiences my classmates and I

knew. It never mattered if the stories were all African American writers because often they were not. What mattered was the cultural relevance of the literature that they were teaching all students and the practical application it had for our everyday lives. Their instructional approach helped to bridge the gap between my classroom performance and my academic capabilities. I began performing up to their expectations and my potential and no longer felt as though I was behind other students.

These same teachers also had a huge influence on the education and academic performance of many other students. Their genuine care and concern for me as a young person with potential pulled out the best in me. What they did for me and other students changed our lives. Their diligence to make sure that their students were building reading competencies made every student that enrolled at the school want those two as their teachers. I was a student that personally carried what I learned from them to high school. The teachers that I came across in high school seemed to be impressed with my knowledge of how to make positive connections and make sense of the literature reading. I owe that ability to Ms. Jones and Mrs. Collier.

My emotional connection for this program evaluation is a very personal one. It relates to the ability of some teachers to make learning culturally relevant, which nurtured my interest in higher education and strengthened my commitment to be the kind of teacher/education administrator that inspires youth. Since I was once a student that some teachers said would not make it, to encounter other teachers who saw my potential and believed I could achieve, it was that connection those teachers made with me that made the educational experience so much more meaningful.

There has been and continues to be an urgent need for classroom teachers and education leaders who understand the importance of cultural relevance and the relationship it has to student performance and academic success. There are students that have the zeal to succeed, but teachers who see the zeal and potential, which often is hidden within, must spark that zeal. Connecting with students in a genuinely authentic way can transform student motivation and achievement.

Education has been and continues to be the passport to a brighter economic future. Employment data from the Department of Labor concerning labor statistics as compared to levels of education shows that, the earning potential of individuals with an education surpasses that of individuals with low educational attainment. In order to prepare students to make successful transitions from school to work we must reach them by making relevant connections to better teach them. Understanding and utilizing a culturally relevant approach to teaching instruction holds promise.

The Goal

McMillian (2003) stated that “various researchers have argued that African American male students are particularly vulnerable to disengagement.” Much of this disengagement comes from the desire to be aloof from the pressures of their existence. The theory that African American males in school are seeking to be disengaged, and cool, as an ego booster, is not comparable to the kind that white males find through attending good schools, landing prestigious jobs, and bringing home decent wages has explored (Kunjufu, 2010). Kunjufu, and researchers like McMillian and Graham (1998), support this claim when they argue that if African American middle school males were more academically disengaged, then peer nominations would indicate that they would more

likely be labeled as disinterested, noncompliant low-achievers. Additionally, they argued, African American males would be more likely to respect their low-achieving male counterparts. As expected, African American males were more likely to be labeled as low-achievers who did “not follow school rules or try hard.” Moreover, these males were aware of these negative perceptions. Graham and her colleagues also concluded that African American males were more academically disengaged than their female counterparts were.

Therefore, the goal of this change plans is to: investigate the potential influence of the challenge of school environment, teacher-student relationship, parent-student relationship, peer-student relationship, student engagement; explore student engagement and influencers that impact student motivation.

This change plan should be valuable to all educational stakeholders i.e. students, parents, school leaders, teachers, and community leaders. The stakeholders should achieve insight into what African American males see as motivating factors affecting their commitment to the academic process of learning.

Setting

The research took place in a large urban district in the state of Wisconsin, in one of the traditional middle schools. The school that the research took place was considered an International Baccalaureate (IB) Middle School, where the students are considered to be the best and brightest. Yet, when people are looking from the outside in, they may have thought that the IB Middle School was just what it states, “the best and the brightest.”

Approximately 95% of the entire student body were African American students, 5% of the remainder of the student body are considered non-African American. This researcher for three reasons selected the school. In the first, the researcher lives in the city that the research was conducted. Secondly, the selected school had a team of educators who were considered to be visionary leaders, who were totally committed in the eighth-graders' motivation, behavior, engagement in the classroom and academic achievement. Thirdly, the researcher was interested in identifying critical variables that affect eighth-grade African American male students. In addition, the eighth-grade students in this school were transitioning to high school where students who have failed to navigate middle school successfully are, at the least, risks for poor academic achievement and at the worst, risks for school dropout.

This change plan took place within a traditional middle school in a large urban district. The school's targeted demographics are as follows: student population is 95% African American comprised of 50% African American males and within that percentage 25% of the African American males were in the eighth-grade. The grade floor was made up of all African American educators, which had different philosophies when it came to educating African American students'. There were 127 eighth-grade students and out of that number, there were 15 special education students that were enrolled. At the time of the research none of the eighth-grade students had to repeat the eighth-grade, the majority of the students were performing ongrade level; 95% of the students that were enrolled qualified for free or reduced-price lunch; 15% of the African American males were considered to be lacking behind when it came to reading. African American males engaged in the academic process of learning, need not only the skills and knowledge to

engage in the academic process of learning successfully, but they also have to be influenced or motivated to a level of personal expectation for success before they take on any academic assignment. If a student is influenced to be personally motivated in actions and behaviors, and guided by a belief that they can be successful in performing any given task, that student holds a powerful life-defining jewel branded as self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997).

SECTION TWO

Assessing the 4 C's

Culture

There was a mounting challenge to give a relevant, quality education to all students, while addressing the barriers that prevent African American males from committing, engaging and achieving at acceptable levels academically before they feel the need to dropout. This was especially true for African American males in urban areas due to some of the environmental barriers they face before they entered the school doors. There are considerable problems facing the family, community, and nation when it comes to African American males. One really does not know where to begin to address the multitude of circumstances and misfortunes within these collective lives. On a daily basis, our community faces a wide array of problems- poor housing, inadequate school systems, crime, violence, drugs, and lack of health care, unemployment, underemployment, and family disengagement. Many organizations and civic groups are quick to render their perspectives on how and what to do about the crisis of young African American males in America. Many different organizations feel as though they have a solution to this national problem. The Muslims say that the solution is separation; National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) says that the solution is voting power; the Urban League says the solution is more educational programs; and the government answer to the solution is to lock them up, kill them, and throw away the key. Even churches have attempted to address the problem by constantly offering many different programs (Sims, 2005).

Philanthropist William Cosby shocked the nation in 2004, with remarks regarding the emotional instability with the African American males with regards of the lack of parenting, proclivities toward activities of self-hate, systemic interactive verbal abuse, and a tendency towards black-on-black crime.

Context

The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University (2005) concluded that half of the nation's African American male students are dropping out of high school. The most severe problems are in segregated high-poverty schools. Students that are in high-poverty schools are marked by students who have less motivation and are often subject to negative peer influences, parents who are generally less active, exert less clout in school affairs, and garner fewer financial resources for the school; and teachers who tend to be less qualified, to have lower expectations, and to teach watered down curriculum.

African American male students attend not only higher poverty schools than white students on an average, but in many metropolitan areas very little overlap exists between the schools that different races also attend. For example, Acevedo-Garcia (2010), stated that 50% of white students attend schools with poverty rates of 20% or less, compared to 7% of African American students.

Conditions

African American male students seem to find it especially difficult to make the transition of learning and valuing education. Many African American males face a lot of social, cultural, economic, institutional, and political barriers and many fail as they attempt to achieve academically. Many of these students are feeling insecure about who they are and about where they are going in life. So many African American male

students feel as though only two things can help to them and that is either die young or going to jail at an early age.

There are many African American male students that are being raised by a single parent with the absent of their fathers. With there being no positive male role model to be an example, they tend to go out within their community and get involved in organized crime and gangs. There are many African American males that have taken on the responsibility of providing for the family because the mother needs help with the managing of the house and bills. With that being said, they take on the role as the absent parent instead of thinking about getting an education.

SECTION THREE

Literature Review

Historical Connection

Throughout the history of American public education, educational gaps in reading have challenged many of our school districts, particularly urban schools and urban school districts in the United States with significant populations of students from diverse backgrounds. The education gap in reading has had many different names. According to Anderson (2007), the education gaps in reading first appeared in the 1800s, over 200 years ago. The gap in education was referred to as the “literacy gap.” The gap existed because 90% of White children were able to read, whereas 90% of African American children did not know how to read, primarily because it was against the law for an individual, who was enslaved, to be taught to read. The literacy gap continued, but was considered to be minimized with the passage of Emancipation Proclamation and the ending of the Civil War. These two events freed enslaved people of African descent that were part of the Civil War (Anderson, 2007) and set the stage for this group of people to lawfully gain an education.

The next educational gap became known as the “elementary school attendance gap” (Anderson, 2007). African American students really did not have schools that they could attend. The schools that were in existence during the time were for White students only. As time continued philanthropists became more involved in educating African American students and establishing schools to teach them. This trend helped to minimize the education gap between African American and White students.

In 1989, the “elementary school attendance gap” (formerly called the literacy gap) became known as the “black and white achievement gap” (Sommer, 1983). This gap was based on Standardized test scores. African American students were not demonstrating success in reading, as measured by achievement the tests. A Nation at Risk (Sommer, 1983) sounded a national alarm and recommendations were enacted to bridge the black and white student achievement gap. However, the reform models failed to close the gap between black and white students achievement.

Once again the achievement gap name changed. The gap no longer was referred to as the “black and white achievement gap”, because now data was being considered for Hispanic American students. Their numbers were rapidly growing within the United States and within public schools. Unfortunately, Hispanic American students, like African American students, were not performing well in public schools either. Their student achievement also lagged behind that of white students. As the 21st Century, with all of its technological and educational advances approached, the educational achievement gap continued and became known as a “digital divide”. The age-old problem and gap in academic achievement of students of color, particularly African American students, persists and the gap in achievement is now reflective in the Annual Yearly Performance (AYP) of schools.

Theoretical Framework

Ladson-Billings (2009) supports the value of cultural relevance in teaching. Ladson-Billings’ emphasis on prior experiences, which shape the teacher’s teaching when educating African American children, is fundamental to the framework of justifying this study. The child’s mind is considered to be a blank slate and waiting to be

filled with educational knowledge. The study is built on teacher center instruction and on the way that the teachers service African American children.

This study drew from Ladson-Billings, theory of culturally relevant pedagogy. Ladson-Billings (2009) asserted that when students' culture is an integral part of the learning process they are more motivated to learn. She emphasizes the teachers' responsibility of environmental preparation while reinforcing how important a student's culture is in the learning process. Ladson-Billings feels that a child is the center of the learning process and that the teacher is considered the facilitator of the learning process. The resistance of learning takes place when the student's culture is not reinforced.

According to the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, there continues to be a growing struggle with African American students throughout the United States in the area of literature. Much of that disconnect comes from the teachers having a lack of knowledge per the cultural backgrounds of their students. Furthermore, there is no allowance for the students who fall back on their everyday living experiences in the learning process. It is at the belief of Ladson-Billings (2009) and Gay (2010) that the use of culturally relevant pedagogy, helps to increase literacy because teachers are more sensitive to the matters of their students.

Findings

What does academic success mean to African American male students? The results of this study indicated similarities in the attitudes and perception of participants concerning the meaning of academic success. The youth associated academic success with working to achieve a position in life and to strive to do one's best. The two participant responses centered around three major themes: obtaining knowledge in order to be successful, future achievement, and self-motivation.

Academic success was defined as an avenue for gaining knowledge that will be able to lead to great opportunities for advancement in life. Being able to obtain a valuable education was a means of achieving future success. This finding supports previous research studies that indicated African American males considered a quality education the pathway to economic and social success (Perry, Steele, & Hilliard, 2003).

Although these participants expressed different individual future goals, each viewed completing middle school as a first step to being able to complete high school and advance on to higher education. These two participants in this study have concrete and precise plans for accomplishing their goals, which included working hard in school and staying focused on their studies. The findings in this study support previous research studies that African American male students desire to achieve an education and desire to have a career related to academic achievement (Cheng & Stark, 2002; Irving & Hudley, 2008). The findings revealed that the African American male students perceived that if they stay in school that good things would happen to them economically.

Researcher, Dr. Kunjufu (2010). stated that when African American males view levels of education as an opportunity for social mobility and career advances they are more successful in school and take learning serious. Academic success was also viewed as an important ingredient for future success. It is considered a pathway for the participants to pursue their hopes and dreams of a better lifestyle. Noguera (2003) agreed that most African American male students are driven to perform well academically because of their hopes and dreams to be successful.

What roles do peers, parents, and educators play in the African American students' ability to achieve academic success? Previous research suggested that successful African American males credited their high successful achievement to supportive parents, great teachers, and their own determination to succeed (Kunjufu, 2010). The participants in this study anticipated the role of their parents, educators, and peers to be one of the factors that motivated and encouraged them to succeed. It is important to understand how variables affect academic success for African American male students who are having a difficult time academically. Therefore, it is beneficial to explore factors that contribute to African American males perceptions towards their academic performance.

Role of the peer. Peers influence and support were the major themes emerging from the resulting data. The participants in this study recognized that their peers influence and support was an important element in their academic success. In this study, the African American male participants stated that they had a positive rapport with their peers.

Peers were influential and could be either a positive force or a negative force in the participants' decision making. The peers had a strong impact on the participants' decision-making. In some cases, the participants would listen to the advice of their peers before listening to the advice of their parents. The advice that was given by the peers had a greater impact than the advice from their parents, because they could better relate to each other. These findings aligned with previous research studies that emphasized the development of the same race peer relationships and support to some extent, that it affects the African American male's academic success. These studies showed that the peer connection played an important role in African American males' success and experiences (Harper, 2006).

Both of the participants viewed themselves in positive peer environments. They stated that they associated with peers who supported them, who encouraged them, and who had similar goals, and who kept them on a positive path. Their association with peers who valued education and were committed to education motivated them to stay committed to the ideals of pursuing an education. These findings agreed with Sullivan's (2002) research stating that peers made the difference in the academic success of African American male students. Although peers could influence a right or wrong decision in life, both participants in this study perceived that their peers motivated them to stay focused on their studies and to stay out of trouble. In addition, they had trust and confidence in each other,

Role of the parents. There were several themes that emerged from the resulting data concerning the parents' role in African American male students' ability to achieve academic success. The emerging themes were parental encouragement, parental involvement and support, and parental expectation. These two participants recognized the importance between parental support and being academically successful.

In previous research studies, African American male students excelled in school when their parents encouraged them and when parents showed interest in their school work (Kunjufu, 2010; Jordan & Cooper, 2002). One of the participants of this study came from a single-parent upbringing, and in a household consisting of a mother. Although the participant grew up in a non-traditional household, he reported the value of getting an education was stressed in his household, he reported the value of getting an education was stressed in his household. In both participants' household, neither mother nor father has a chance to attend college right after high school, but the participants stated that their parents or guardian has always encouraged their academic achievement by telling them to do their best, remain focused and work hard to obtain their goal. This type of encouragement from their parents or guardian gave these African American males the drive to succeed in school.

Researcher Dr. Jawanza Kunjufu (2014) affirmed that African American males show high educational outcomes when their parents visited the school, were involved in the school activities, and had high expectations for their academic success in high school and beyond. The two participants reported having parents and guardians that were involved with their academic behavior. They were motivated to do well when the parents or guardians showed great interest in their education. According to literature by Asa Hilliard (2003), positive parent involvement has positive influence African American males.

When parents reinforce the value of getting an education, the students work hard to make them proud. The participants in this study indicated they performed better when their parents actively participated in their education or had high expectations for success. Parental expectation reinforced the importance of parental involvement in African American male students' academic success. The African American males in this study credited their parents or guardians for encouraging, motivating, supporting, and staying involved in their education.

These findings agreed with Brown and Fiester's (2003) research that parental background did not affect student grades, but that students earned higher grades and test scores when their parents or guardians were involved in their education. When parents or guardians instill in African American males the purpose and value of an education the students will also take value and have a positive attitude when it comes to education.

Overall parental involvement, encouragement, and high expectations were reported to be related to the participants' internal incentive mechanism to achieve academically. When educational institutions continue to find ways of bring African

American parents into the educational arena, positive learning results may evolve from the African American male students.

Role of Educators

When pertaining to the role of the educators in helping African American male students succeed, findings indicate that emphasis needs to be placed on encouraging positive school experiences, motivating students to reach to their full potential, creating a bond with students, and understanding their unique cultural background (Ladson-Billings, 2009).

Participants who felt cared about, supported, and understood felt connected to the educational process. Several themes emerged from the resulting data concerning the role of the educator in the African American male students' ability to achieve academic success. The emerging themes were caring and supportive teachers, teachers that met the individual needs, and teachers understanding cultural environment.

According to Sergiovanni (1996), schools must invoke a school climate that promotes caring and learning for all students. The findings in this study concluded that the participants perceived teachers as caring and having a supportive attitude. Teachers should thoroughly explain the materials that would be taught and give extra help after school to African American male students. They need to be willing to stay after school and help students realize their academic potential, as well as show that they care and are concerned by supporting African American male students in their school activities. These findings concurred with previous research stating caring and concerned teachers influence African American male students' outcomes (Wiggins, 2007). The participants felt that teachers showed up for extracurricular activities had less discipline problems from African American males in the classroom than those teachers who did not attend extracurricular activities of their students. The involvement in extracurricular activities or some constructive activity afterschool helped with the academic success of the African American male students focus on their goals and school. This also kept them from becoming involved in destructive street activities.

Ladson-Billings' (2009) research noted that teachers must meet the individual needs of African American students by using appropriate instructional tasks to accomplish academic objectives. The participants in this study perceived that African American male students need encouragement and individual assistance from teachers, instead of being labeled as slow to grasp the classroom material. One of the participants felt that some teachers are quick to label African American male students because they do not understand the curriculum that is being taught. This finding supported researcher (Tatum, 2009) who revealed high-achieving African American males excelled in academics when they have a friendly relationship with their teachers, and when their school encouraged them, supported them, and was considerate of their needs.

Teachers should focus personal attention on African American male students who are struggling with their class work. There needs to be a program put in place to help African American male students focus on building positive peer relationships, cooperative skills, and teaching the basic life skills. By focusing on these things, the students will feel more worthwhile. By putting these things in place, the students should show improvement in math, reading, and language arts. The school realized that they needed to recognize the students that were in jeopardy of failing the eighth grade. The school recognized that simply identifying the achievement problems would not alone improve academic success; instead the school had to employ an alternative learning method to reach the individual needs of the students (Sellers, 2009). According to Fleischman & Heppen, (2009) smaller learning communities (SLC) provide personal learning environments that provide a sense of belonging for the students and foster great student engagement in learning. The participants in this study understood that when African American males were slow to grasp the understanding of the content that was being taught, that teachers needed to have patience with them, encourage them, and instill confidence in them.

Both of the participants perceived that teachers sometimes lack sensitivity or understanding of the way that African American males develop academically, due to the fact that they do not understand the environment that the African American male comes from. This lack of understanding often-lead teachers to assume that disruptive students should be isolated from the class. Yet, the participants feel that the teachers need to incorporate some type of alternative learning methods in the curriculum that is relevant to the realities of African American males, which will keep the disruptive students involved in the learning process. These findings are consistent with previous research that indicates good classroom management promotes positive classroom experiences (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009).

Overall, the results of this study indicated that both the participants felt that the role of the educators as caring about the African American male students' cultural background as well as about their academic development. This research agreed with Kunjufu (2014) who stated that strong leadership, positive staff attitudes, and high expectations led to higher expected achievement success.

SECTION FOUR

Methodology

The purpose of this change plan was to explore the motivational factors that contribute to academic success with African American males. This chapter includes a description of the change plan design, participants, instrumentation, data collection and analysis. The change plan addresses the following question: What do African American male students perceive as contributing to their success?

Research Design

In conducting this study, a qualitative research method was used to gather data concerning the motivational factors that contribute to African American males' academic success. Marshall and Rossman (2010) contended, "Qualitative methods helps find the natural solutions to problems and solutions that people devise without policy intervention" (p.15). Qualitative research is also, a broad approach to the study of social phenomenon: its various genres are naturalistic and interpretive, and they draw on multiple methods of inquiry (Marshall & Rossman, 2010).

In this study, the researcher gathered information by interviewing students and collecting demographics profile data. The qualitative research method allowed the researcher to learn directly from students' factors that influenced their academic success, as well as challenges to and solutions for success in school.

Demographic Profile

Focusing on a Black Community (pseudonym) profile gives the reader an opportunity to understand the student population at International Baccalaureate (IB) Middle School from several perspectives: the demographics of the community, the

educational level of the community, per capita income, median household income, and crime rates.

In 2013, the Black Community which is located in the Northwest section of the city had a population of 43,638 of which 60% Black, 30% White, and 10% other. The median age was 45.3 years; 25.5% of the population was under 18 years and 15% was 65 and older. In 2013, females accounted for more than half of the population (55%). In 2013, 83.5% of people 25 years and over had graduated from high school and 20.6% had a bachelor's degree or higher. Only 1% of the population spoke a language other than English (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013).

In 2014, the median income of households in this community was \$33, 998. During the period 2011 through 2014, 75% of the households received employment earnings and 15% of households received retirement income other than Social Security. The average income from Social Security was \$11, 250. Additionally, persons living below poverty level were 23.8%. In 2009-2011, the leading industries for the employed population, 16 years and older, in the Black Community, were merchandising, 28% and educational services, healthcare, and social assistance, 25% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). As of June 2013, the Wisconsin Department of Labor estimated a 9.3% unemployment rate in the county labor force. This figure was not seasonally adjusted (Wisconsin Department of Labor, 2013).

According to the 2013, Milwaukee Bureau of Investigation crime statistical report, there were 50 criminal offenses reported in the Black Community: ten robberies, seven assaults, 15 burglaries, and 18 vehicle thefts. The Wisconsin Children Court

System (2013) reported that there were 176 Black youth, from the age 14 to 17 incarcerated in the correctional system.

Study Site

International Baccalaureate (IB) Middle School (pseudonym) had a total enrollment of 418 students for the 2014-2015 school year. The school reported the following enrollment 88.3% African American, and 90% of the students are eligible for free-reduced lunch and 81.6% of the student population has been identified as economically disadvantaged. Furthermore, 14.6% of the total students attending school had a documented disability. The researcher selected International Baccalaureate (IB) Middle School for the study because of its large African American population and because there were 124 eighth-graders enrolled within the school. Fifty percent of the eighth graders were African American male students. Twenty percent of the African American male students are at or above grade level in all subject areas. In addition, this school was selected because it had been under the same school leadership for two consecutive years. The completion rate for African American students increased from 90% for school year 2012 -2013 to 95% 2013 -2014. The retention rate for this grade population, eighth-grade decreased from 10% in 2012 – 2013 to 5% 2013 – 2014.

The professional staff consisted of two full-time administrators, one principal and one assistant principal. The educational attainment of teachers included 10 teachers with Bachelor's Degree, nine teachers with Master's Degrees, four with Specialists Degrees, and two paraprofessionals with Bachelor's Degrees. The years of instructional experiences among teachers include eight teachers with 1-10 years of experience, one

teacher with less than one year of experience, five teachers with 11-20 years of experience, and nine with more than 20 years of experience.

Data Analysis Technique

The researcher used a semi-structured, qualitative, general interview approach to interview two eighth-grade African American male students. Marshall and Rossman (2010) stated that the most important aspect of the interviewer's approach concerns conveying the attitude that the participants' views are valuable and useful. The interview process generated a wide variety of information and provided the opportunity for immediate follow-up and clarification (Mc Millan, 2011). The researcher used the data from research studies on academic success as a basis for constructing interview questions (see Appendix A). The researcher presented 13 open-ended questions to explore the participants' views. According to Patton (2014), the truly open-ended question does not pre-suppose which dimensions of feeling, analysis, or thought will be salient for the interviewee. The interviewee was free to choose whatever words or thoughts to convey his or her perceptions to an open-ended question without being guided or manipulated by the researcher. deMarrais (2004) suggested, the researcher listens more than talks, but offers supportive, encouraging nods, smiles, and verbal expressions. The purpose of the interview was to find out from the participants those feelings, thoughts, and intentions that cannot be observed (Patton, 2014). The researcher's role was to obtain rich descriptions of participants' experiences (deMarrais, 2004). According to Eyring, people should speak of experiences that have been significant to their times of interest and the relationships they have with others (1998). The interview questions in this study explored

perceptions of factors students believed contributed to their academic success as well as challenges to and solutions for academic success.

Data Collection Process

The researcher contacted the two students participants and parents either face-to-face or by telephone to verify their consent and inform them that their student had been selected to participate in the research study. The researcher then arranged interview dates, informed students about the meeting place, and set appointment times for the interviews. The appointments for the two participants were set to occur during their non-class activity period. The researcher identified a meeting location within the school. The interviews lasted from 45 minutes to an hour. A pseudonym was used in place of actual school's name and each participant chose a pseudonym for identification purposes.

The researcher informed the participants about the purpose of the research, the need for individual privacy, and protection from emotional harm. Furthermore, the participants were informed that there were no right nor wrong answer and his personal views should be freely expressed. During the face-to-face interviews, participants were asked 13 questions that explored their perceptions of factors contributing to academic success. The researcher used follow-up questions to probe deeper for additional responses or more information when not provided, not clear, or more details needed.

The researcher's task allowed participants to build upon their experiences (Creswell, 2013) while they explored responses to the interview questions without leading participants to a particular answer (McMillan, 2011). Individual interview questions were audiotaped with permission from the participants and parents.

Professional care was taken to assure that the participants were comfortable with the audiotaping (McMillan, 2011).

Data Analysis

The researcher analyzed the data for this study by using the Creswell Data Analysis spiral approach (Creswell, 2013). This approach sought to provide understanding of the participants' experiences by reflecting on the whole data set to form initial categories, synthesizing each category while moving in analytic circles to explain and support each category. As suggested by Creswell (2013), in the loop, category formation represents the heart of qualitative data analysis.

After each interview, the researcher labeled field notes with pseudonyms chosen by the participants'. The researcher went back over the audiotape interviews, in order to transcribe the study:

1. The data were broken into smaller units of individual words, key phrases, sentences, similarities and differences.
2. Listened to the entire data collection several times to identify categories and subcategories for interpretation of themes.
3. Assigned general descriptions to the themes and color-coded them for easy management to represent each participant's significant statement. As suggested by Creswell (2013) classifying pertains to taking the text or qualitative information apart, looking for categories, themes, or dimensions of information. McMillan (2011) stated, the goal of the analysis is to discover patterns, ideas, explanations, and understanding.

4. Integrated, summarized and presented color-coded significant statements and themes in the final format provided a visual reference to specific themes.

Miles and Huberman (2013) notes that a visual display of data permits the analyst to organize, compress and assemble information into a format that will aid in the understanding of what is happening and draw justified conclusions.

Summary

In summary, the qualitative research design allowed the researcher to explore factors that African American male students perceived contributed to their academic success, to identify challenges that inhibited their academic success and to develop a better understanding regarding solutions for improving academic success for this target group of students. The interview guide consisted of 13 questions. The interviews of two students took place in a designated location at Queen Middle School. The research data was analyzed, organized, and coded to find common themes and patterns in the interviews. The audiotape was deleted once the researcher completed analysis.

SECTION FIVE

Findings

This study is guided by the overall question: What do African American male students perceive as factors contributing to their academic success? There were no additional supporting questions addressed in this study.

This section contains demographic profiles of each participant and an analysis of the data collected from interviews with two African American male eighth-grade students. The qualitative research design used in conducting this study allowed the researcher to gather actual accounts of perceptions of academic success. All questions were deemed appropriate and usable for the actual study. None of the questions needed alteration before the interview study took place. Prior to the interviews, the researcher informed each of the participants of the need to express their personal views on academic success.

Demographic Profiles

Magic, is an eighth-grade student, 12 years of age, lives in a house with his mother and father, and is a student that is proficient or advanced in all subject areas. He reported that he has been on the Honor Roll ever since sixth grade. Magic stated that his goals were to be accepted in one of Milwaukee's top high schools and to attend college. He stated that he is a very hard worker and believes that a good education pays off in the long run. Magic believes that his dedication and hard work towards his academics led him to reach his goal of being accepted at International Baccalaureate (IB) Middle School. He stated that he set his goals at the beginning of this school year: "I believe that it's important to take what I've learned and apply it in my life. I'm a thinker and sometimes I think too much. I realize what it takes for me to get ahead in the twenty-first century."

While at International Baccalaureate (IB) Middle School, Magic stated that he has not really participated in non-academic clubs (ex. Basketball). He likes to participate in activities that educate his mind, such as the Advance Readers Club and Future City. Magic emphasized that he does not talk a lot because he likes to analyze what others are saying, but he will ask questions if he needs clarity about anything. He participates in College for Kids at University Wisconsin LaCrosse. Magic stated this week long program allows him to see how college life will be for him. He continues to state, that he wants to be prepared for what high school has for him and college. Magic stated that he tries to stay balanced with his schoolwork, by not attempting to do all his assignments at once, or at the last minute.

Frank Allen, age 13, lives with his guardian, who is his aunt. Frank is an eighth grade student with aspirations of attending high school in the fall. “I plan to go to high school and to do my best. I’m kind of scared, but I feel that I am prepared for the challenge to come. I love learning!”

At International Baccalaureate (IB) Middle School, Frank Allen participated in the Advance Readers Club, General Leaders Club, and football. Outside of school, he spends most of his time with his mother and brother. He expressed that during his middle school years, “How much the world has become difficult for African American males. It seems as though we are a target for destruction.” He remarks that once he completes high school, that he plans to attend college so that he can help his mother and brother. Frank Allen stated that he wants to be successful and be able to provide for his family and possibly get them all to relocate.

Findings

The data derived from the analysis of the interviews with the students are presented to correspond with the supporting research question of the study. The researcher has taken particular care to present the perspectives of each participant in a logical and sequential order as guided by the supporting question: What does academic success mean to African American male students?

During the interviews, the participants associated academic success with future achievement and having a purposeful life. They believed that being academically successful meant setting goals for themselves, hard work in accomplishing those goals, have great support from their families, and taking everything that they have and are

leaning into their future adventures. In addition, these students' self-motivation plays a major role in achieving their current and future goals.

Magic believed that to be academically successfully meant gaining knowledge as a prerequisite for success. "Doing the things that I need to do in order to achieve the knowledge that I need in order to make it wherever I want to be at in life." He believes that academic success is an individual goal and that you cannot make anyone, want to be successful academically:

Some people might want to go all the way to the top and want a doctorate, and they might consider that academic success. While others might just want to stop at their high school diploma, and consider that academic success. Academic success is just an individual goal that people set for themselves.

He believed that hard work was the reason that he reaches his goals and that he was allowed freedom to make sound decisions about his academic success.

I have always been taught to work hard for what I want. By keeping up with the hard work now, I can play harder when I'm older. So I think that by working hard now, I can achieve the goal that I set for myself. I am working on putting myself in a position that every top college will be knocking my door down to get me. I want the finer things in life and I want to be able to provide those things to my parents as well.

Frank Allen believed academic success would allow a person to advance in life and improve his lifestyle, as well as the lifestyle for his family. According to Frank Allen, a person who is academically successful is someone who is able to actually make something of themselves in this wicked world and to have the courage to further in life than what people expect them to. Academic success now affects your future success. He also stated that his family is very strong when it comes to education and he realizes that

without a good education, that he cannot go anyplace in life. Frank Allen stated that he knows that being educated could bring increase in his family's lifestyle.

During the interview sessions, the researcher sought participants understanding of the role that their peers, parents, and teachers played in the motivational factors of African American Male students. The participants identified many factors that they perceived as contributing to African American male students academic success. Peers that serve as motivators, mentors, and trusted friends were unanimously a key factor noted by the participants influencing African American males' academic success.

Both participants perceived that parental involvement, parental encouragement, and parental educational support influenced their desire to succeed. The two participants expressed having parents or guardians who had high expectations for their educational success. The participants reported that their parents valued education and supported them in their extracurricular activities, which gave them motivation for continued hard work and success.

The participants noted that educators could help African American male students succeed by getting rid of negative stereotypes, by displaying strong leadership, and having a caring attitude. Furthermore, the participants stated it is important for educators to maintain communication with students, focus on their individual needs, and be aware of their cultural background. They believed that African American male students need educators and administrators who will encourage, motivate, and promote their academic success.

Role of Peers

The participants in this study agreed that peers were influential in their academic success. The two participants stated that the peers they were around influenced them in a positive manner. They found peers to be influential in decision making, keeping each other motivated and focused on the studies of school, and their goals. Findings revealed that peers listened, and encouraged each other, as well as served as study partners and mentors. Moreover, the peers played a positive role by exhibiting cooperation and trust in one another.

Frank Allen noted the importance of friends supporting each other and having confidence and trust in each other. Magic indicated friends motivated and encouraged each other to achieve their goal of academic success. He noted that the impact that friends have on each other could be far greater than the impact that a family member or a teacher has.

Friends can motivate each other. It may be more of an impact to hear the encouragement from a friend than it is from a family member or a teacher. People always say your friends are the ones who are going to get you in trouble, but they are also the one that encourage you to do your best.

Magic gave an example of trying to motivate a friend to achieve in academics.

Let's just say that I have a friend who is not academically sound as I am. If I can get him to see that this is where you need to be, you can be this or you can do that, then the friendship will probably be the encouraging factor.

Magic recalled that friends tend to listen to friends more so than they listen to their parents or teachers when it comes to doing work in school because they identify with each other.

I think as teenagers we kind of forget that our parents, or teachers, were once where we are....Everything they are trying to tell us is to help us out,

because they know what it is like, and they have been through it. But when you are with your friends, you feel as though you can relate to them. Because we are experiencing the same things right now, so I can listen to you because you know what you are talking about. But of course we forget that we are just learning together.

According to Frank Allen, friends help with academic achievement by serving as mentors, giving encouragement, and by serving as a study buddy.

We can get together sometimes, study, and work on projects together. Me and T-Mack (pseudonym) have study sessions sometimes over the weekend at each other's houses. We want to be very successful in high school next year and as you say, it starts here and now, and you can either be a solution to the problem or continue to fall in the loop to be a problem.

He also remarked that by hanging out with like-minded friends who are focused and doing their schoolwork will cause positive results.

I remember you saying, that the type of people that you associate with is important. I have always agreed with that statement, because it's important for us to achieve academic success. If you hang out with negative peers, you will get negative results and start to behave like them. As you have said before to us, like-minded people hang out together and negative people is like poison running through your blood. So with that being said, I hang with peers that are focused on being academically successful.

Magic believed positive friends kept each other focused because each had goals.

In order to help friends achieve academic success, he remarked:

It's important to help your friends have the mindset to want academic success. It's my job to be positive and to tell them positive things. By doing that it will keep them on the right track. I'm a positive influence on them and they too are a positive influence on me.

When asked who would have the greater influence on his mindset, parents or friends?

Magic stated, I believe that my parents would, but my friends and I do positive things.

"We have goals in our life, but my family is where my mindset comes from."

Role of Parents

The participants in this study reported parents who took an active part in education had an impact on their academic success. Participants reported that they did better in school when they were motivated and encouraged by their parents. Furthermore, the participants liked that parents are involved in their academics and extracurricular activities.

The two participants perceived their parents and guardians as valuing education and holding high expectations for them to complete middle school and beyond. They indicated that they were aware of their parents and guardians expectations for education and this encouraged them to want to go as far as they could.

Frank Allen's aunt has played an important role in his education since he was a small child. His aunt valued education and conveyed that to Frank Allen many times. In addition, his aunt motivated him to do his best in school.

My aunt plays an important role, because she has always been there since I was little. She taught me the importance of doing well in school and about having a positive mindset. Plus she is really strict and firm with me about her expectations when it comes to education. She really respect education and really helps to contribute to it. She is one of my biggest encouragers.

His aunt stayed involved in his education by seeing that he completed his homework assignments and emailing and calling his teachers in order to check the status on his grades. "She made sure I was doing my homework. She knows that when I come home, I always do my assigned assignments before I do anything." Frank Allen also stated that his aunt is involved in his schoolwork, which "helped me do better in school." With her constant encouragement to succeed in school and her interest in his grades, he

has continued to develop a positive mindset toward school. “It’s just stuck in my mind that I have to get a good education.”

Magic’s parents support his academic activities. His parents are very supportive at Queen Middle School and they are a positive force in his life.

My parents have always encouraged my siblings and I to the best we can in all that we do and they have always been very supportive. My father comes to check on me at school, in order to make sure that I’m staying on top of my studies. They have always been active in my academics and extracurricular endeavors. They are a huge motivation for me.

When asked, did it make a difference to have your parents involved in your education and extracurricular activities, Magic stated “Yes Ma’am! I think everyone likes to make their parents proud, and to see your parents proud makes you proud. I believe that it makes a difference in the way you address certain things in life.” According to Magic, making parents feel you value their opinion can have a major impact on their involvement in school. To get parents involved in academics, Magic stated:

Well, I think first, they must feel comfortable in the environment because a lot of times our parents, well people in the community, feel pushed away from the school system. It is like, you should bring your children here, but when we ask you for your opinion, we may or may not support your opinion....By asking for your parent’s opinion, and then going the complete opposite, you are basically telling them that their opinion does not matter. So I feel that by making the parents feel important in the school system can make a major impact on the involvement.

According to Frank Allen, his aunt often speaks of the value of a good education. She is one of the driving forces of why he does well in school. “My aunt is extremely fond of me getting a great education, attending a great high school and then college. My aunt graduated from high school and started off attending college, but I can’t remember if she finished or not.” He also stated that he has a deep appreciation for his aunt, because

she really didn't have to take him in when he was little. "I'm glad that she keeps pushing me and telling me that I gotta do this and that in order to be successful."

Role of Educators

Both participants stated that they perceived educators as encouraging, caring, supporting, and praising African American male students in their academic success. The African American males that were a part of this study were aware of the stereotypes associated with their race. This awareness, as noted by the participants, can have an effect on the self-esteem of African American males, which in return can have an effect on their school performance. They perceived that educators should make an effort to understand the African American culture and to find ways to eliminate negative stereotypes within the school culture.

When looking at school leaders, such as principals, the participants felt that they should be proactive and get to know African American male students in a more positive way, in order to improve their academic success. They believe that it is the job of the school leader to discourage negative ideas about African American male students and praise them when they do a great job academically and not just in sports. In addition, the participants perceived that school leaders are leaders and expect them to lead by example.

According to Frank Allen, African American male students feel insecure about their intellectual performance. He believed that negative stereotypes make African American males feel inadequate about what they can and cannot do.

At least tell them some facts of what is going on and how great that they are doing. I mean not all....African American males are below standards. People put stereotypes on us and that makes a lot of people feel insecure about what they can and cannot do."

Magic indicated that students would benefit if the school leader shared encouraging words, but he realized the encouragement should come from within each individual. “It is my opinion, that encouragement starts inside of yourself, but the school leader could encourage, they could share encouraging words or thoughts, but if you don’t believe it inside of yourself then it won’t mean anything.” When asked if the school leader played a part in reversing the thinking of young African American male students, Magic felt that a lot of African American male students perceived intelligence as something that must be hidden in order to be popular, but encouragement could change this mentality.

A lot of African American males, in my opinion, feel that it is not cool to be intelligent. Most of them feel that it is best to be, you know, seen but not heard. Yet I think if there was a way to encourage them to get away from that mindset of thinking, then you cannot be cool or it is not cool to be smart. If there was a way that we can get each other away from that mindset, I believe that a lot more African American males would be more successful academically.

The role of the teachers seems to be very important to both these participants. They emphasized the need for encouragement from their teachers. They mention that they need their teachers to have a caring attitude, help them to develop their confidence, and help them to discover their highest potential. In addition, they want their teachers to understand their background and as well as committed to understanding their personal needs. Furthermore, African American male students benefit from teachers who take time to thoroughly explain the assignments and give them extra help after school.

Magic also expressed that teachers can help students realize their academic ability by instilling confidence in students. He spoke how he knows other African American male students who are struggling in school, but they began to gain confidence when encouraged by their teachers.

I have several friends at other schools in middle and high school who is not as academically advance as I am. I think that because they have teachers that encourage them, that they have found the confidence to do better academically. Now they realize that they can do it, because the teachers constantly encourage them.

He also remarked that teachers sometimes give up on certain students instead of giving encouragement to those students to want to succeed. “I see this a lot where teachers might want to give up on certain students, but I believe that if they would just keep their focus on them, I think that the struggling students would eventually come around.”

Magic further stated that he notices teachers would have disruptive students removed from the classroom instead of finding an alternative method to deal with the disruptive students within the classroom. He stated that he believes that it is easier to just allow them to continue getting the classroom lesson so that they can also work on being. He stated, that putting students out does not benefit the student; instead it sends a negative message.

When I’m walking down the hallway, I see a lot of students being put out the classroom. I feel that when the students are disrupting the learning environment of their classmates that they are not doing any good for their classmates, but if they are outside the classroom, then it is not doing any good for them either. I feel that by the teacher putting them out that the teacher is giving their power away and basically saying that there is no hope for them.

In addition, Magic stated that teachers who are not involved in afterschool activities are perceived by students as not caring about them or their extracurricular involvement beyond the school day and that these are the teachers that have a difficult time controlling their classes.

We have good teachers here on our eighth grade floor that is willing to go the extra mile. They will stay later in order to help students with assignments or to just allow the student to talk to them. You know all about that Ms. D. because

you let your students come and talk their problems out all the time. But on the other hand, there are some teachers that are only in operation from 7:30 until 3:30pm and after that, they are off duty. I do believe and think that those teachers have a more difficult time with their classes because they are not involved outside the classroom. I believe that those are the teachers that have a more difficult time with their classrooms because the students see them as being uncaring. As for the teachers that Magic has had at Queen Middle School over the past

couple of years, have shown that they cared about his academic performance and inspired him towards excellence.

I have had a lot of teachers. The teachers that I have encountered over the years have cared about my academic performance. I really cannot say the same thing for other students. I guess because of the way that I carry myself is what has made the teachers realize that I really care about my education. Many of the teachers say that they see something in the inside that makes them push me harder. I work towards excellence on a daily basis.

Frank Allen believed that teachers should help African American male students discover their capabilities and abilities by encouraging them to have confidence that they can learn.

Teachers can help us by showing us our capabilities and abilities. They can show us how well we can learn because they work with us to learn and by working with us we can gain confidence. Don't get me wrong we can do it, but sometimes we need that reassurance to boost our self-esteem.

In addition, Frank Allen believe that teachers need to understand the African American community and the environment surrounding students in order for them to better understand how to service the African American male student population.

Well, some teachers can actually understand where you are coming from, because they are apart from the same community. The city that we live in is not too much of a great place for African American males. We are targets because we are black males, which make things a little harder for us to live. But if teachers can actually understand where we come from and our background surrounding us, then they would be able to understand us better.

Frank Allen stated that he feels that teachers actually need to thoroughly explain the class material and give extra help to those students that need it.

Some teachers explain the assignments, but they don't explain it completely. We are not in high school yet, and definitely are not college students. Some students need that extra help, in order to understand what needs to be done. I just feel that teachers need to take in consideration that every student does not learn the same and at the same pace.

School Environment

Both of the participants also reflected on the importance of the school environment. They perceived that there was a connection between aspects of their school environment and academic achievement for the African American male students. The school environment was conceptualized as contributing to components that increase the likelihood of African American males being academically successful. During the interview, the participants stated that they learned best in a safe, well-managed, and positive environment. They viewed a positive environment as being able to shape their learning and behavior. The participants felt that having an environment with more African American male and female teachers in the classroom, serving as role models and mentors, would support their academic development because they can easily relate to their outside environment, but would also help develop them academically.

Magic thought that more African American male teachers would be a benefit to the African American male students because they could easily relate to what they are going through. Having more African American male teachers would serve as inspiration to them. Magic simply stated that it could "motivate student to do better and to see a different outcome of life.

I've noticed that there isn't that many African American male educators in the school and I think that without having somebody you can relate to, is not as encouraging. I believe it is important that we African American male students have African American males to look up to. That should play a big role in motivating the students to do better.

According to the participants, when African American male students see other African American males in a professional role, it makes them more motivated to be successful academically. They felt that it was important for more African American males to see other African American males in a more positive manner. Frank Allen stated, “all African American male students don’t have that positive male image at home and they need to see that all African American males aren’t criminal minded. What better place to have that positive image, but in the school that you attend.”

The participants in this study were clear and extremely knowledgeable about the challenges that African American male students have to go through, in order to obtain success academically. The challenges hindering success and the solutions at promoting success focused on the community and the school. Lastly, the participants commented on self-determination and motivation as solution for success for African American male students.

Challenges

The participants presented many examples of challenges that African American males face in academics. They mentioned the impact of negative images on academic success. Often these images tend to lead students to believing that they can imitate a particular lifestyle. As Frank Allen stated,

I feel that a lot of times we get images of what we should be like off of videos, movies, and different television shows, as though we are all supposed to be rich and famous like the males that are being shown on the screen. There is alcohol, sex, and drugs, and most African American males think that is the lifestyle they are supposed to live up to and attempt to mimic.

People accept the negative images and begin to develop “the mindset that academic success is not cool.” According to Magic, society’s opinions concerning African American males may affect their self-confidence.

Just the way that people look at African American males is just....I don’t know....upsetting. Society look at us as though were nothing and that we don’t really matter. But what is worse is when your own kind looks at you that way! It is really sad that society has a bad perception of African American males. I feel as though nobody really believes in positive success for us.

In addition, Magic perceived that if African American male students are constantly told that they cannot be successful, then they begin to believe, react, and agree with the negative comments being made.

Basically, I feel that what hinders people from success is someone telling you that you can’t. Simply saying that you can’t do this and you can’t do that. Basically, if you keep hearing the negative remarks, you begin to believe in the remarks that are being made and you don’t even try to be academically successful.

Both participants perceived the lack of community initiatives as a challenge to their academic success. They felt as though the life of African American males do not matter because of all the events that have taken place across the States. They felt that if the community would get involved with education by mentoring, tutoring, and encouraging African American males, then more African American males would come to think more about academics as a way out of life negative situations. They both perceived that community officials need to do more about setting curfews and keeping African American males involved with activities that would help to deter them from violence and drug activities and to foster academics. Furthermore, having the community involved, lets students know that the community cares about their education.

Frank Allen perceived that the community does not emphasize to African American males the dangers of street life nor reinforce to them what education can accomplish.

The community can get involved more with the system. They can help the students by informing them of what is really happening in the streets. The community plays a big role in helping to educate us of what is happening in this crazy world.

The lack of community involvement when dealing with academics and African American males seems to hurt to African American males' perception of the community. The community, as analyzed by Magic, could make a better effort at showing that they care about their lives. Magic feels that the community is more interested in athletics, but less interest on academics.

One thing that I noticed is that athletics is always a great booster. Yet, when it comes to academics, it is hard to really get people involved. I believe that if the community was involved not only in showing up for basketball games, but also graduations, then the community would send a loud message that they care and want African American males to be successful athletically and academically.

Solutions

During the interviews, both participants made several suggestions to help African American males become academically successful. In addition, the participants identified several study strategies that they found beneficial for having achieved academically.

Both of the African American male participants indicated studying at home and using various study strategies in school, as well as applying good listening techniques in class promoted academic success for them. They also stated the note taking was another strategy that would bring about success. Both Magic and Frank Allen stated that these strategies were ideas that should be incorporated by peers, parents, schools, and

community in order to help motivate African American males to become academically successful.

These two participants expressed that more African American males need to take responsibility for their education. They perceived that hard work, encouragement from their peers, being around other groups of people that are likeminded, self-determination, and believing in their selves as viable solutions to bring about academic success. Magic remarked:

It is so important to believe in yourself. Once you begin to believe in yourself, you can do things you never begin to imagine. And once you begin to believe in yourself, others will start to believe in you as well. With faith everything is possible.

Magic suggested that involving friends in your studying would help yourself and them. He stated that he enjoys studying with his friends, because it is motivating. Also, he stated that he believes in using flash cards, and drilling friends with questions and using graphic organizers to help in writing.

Sometimes it is difficult to study alone...I tend to work better in a group setting when I can bounce idea off of others. When you can be engaged with other people, I think it is more effective than being alone. In order to obtain academic success you have to work hard.

He expressed that friends and peers can motivate each other to stay focused. Magic feels that there are many different strategies that you use at home to help you continue to stay focused on the goal. He stated that he makes sure that he spends time reading the school information from the day and review any notes that he took in class. He finds this method very helpful in remembering the information.

Frank Allen believed that the best solution to help African American male students succeed is to offer them some type of educational program that will allow them to experience success. “We need another educational program. For example like, an educational program that allows them to have success, like a sports curriculum. You know that there are a lot of African American males that like sports, so that might attract them.” He continued to say that he participates in football as a way of trying to bond with other people outside his circle of friends. Frank Allen continued to comment that he found participating in football after school provided an opportunity for him to engage in a worthwhile activity.

After I complete my assignments, it is something I can do to stay focused instead of doing something bad. After school is over, I use to go to football practice. That is what I play instead of going home and being out in the streets causing problems. It really helps me feel like I have a strong relationship with some people that are a part of my culture.

Frank Allen stated that he uses notes as study method in order to help him remember information from his classes. He found writing definitions and the main idea of the subject matter to help him review and study for tests. “I make sure that I write everything down that my teachers go over in class, so that when I get home to do my assignment that I know what I’m doing.”

Both participants commented that they both perceived that African American males need to believe and have confidence that their own race is capable of succeeding.

It is important to try and pull up your own race. We have to prove to the world what we can do and be. We are known to many as the generation that doesn’t care about anything, but if we actually stand up and do our best at everything that we do, we can be the best at whatever we put our minds too”

Overall the two participants felt that they were prepared for life after middle school. They felt that self-motivation, hard work, and the belief in self-resonation. Magic and Frank Allen felt that they have been given a great opportunity for success at Queen Middle School and that the teachers had prepared them well for their next transition high school. They both felted that their teachers helped to push them to academic success. Frank Allen stated, “I think that everything that I mentioned to you, contributed to my success; my teachers pushing me and making me work harder and my family being on my back. Thank you so very much for everything!”

Summary

The purpose of this section was to report the findings that emerged from the data collected from the two African American male eighth grade students. Through interviews, the researcher was able to obtain the perception of what motivates African American male students for academic success, at Queen Middle School.

The researcher’s findings in the study noted common themes and patterns related to academic success among these students. Among the African American male participants, academic success meant being able to obtain knowledge in order to bring about success, self-motivation, and future achievement. The factors influencing African American males’ academic success included parental involvement, peer support, caring teachers, recognition of achievement, understanding cultural heritage, sake well-mannered environment, and a positive environment. The challenges to African American male students’ academic success included negative stereotypes, lack of community initiatives, and lack of self-motivation. Finally, the solutions to African American males’ academic success included positive male role models, mentoring, and self-initiatives.

SECTION SIX

Data Analysis & Interpretation

In this section, the researcher reported the summary of study, discussion of the findings, and conclusions and implications according to the findings. Recommendations based on the analysis of the data are also provided.

Summary

The study explored factors that African American male students perceived contributed to academic success as well as investigated the challenges to academic success and solutions that students believed to be necessary for improving academic success. The research question that guided the study was: What factors do African American male students perceive as contributing to their academic success?

The supporting questions that assisted in the study were

1. What does academic success mean to African American males students?
2. What roles does parents, peers, and educators play in the African American male students' ability to achieve academic success?
3. What are some challenges and solutions for accomplishing academic success?

The qualitative study was completed by conducting interviews with two African American eighth grade students, in an urban school district in Milwaukee. The researcher solicited the help of the two students and their parents. The students were chosen by the level of maturity and there grading. Each interview consisted of 13 questions and follow-up questions when necessary to gain clarity and understanding of

the interviewees' responses. Both of the interviews were audio taped and transcribed. The researcher coded the information that the participants provided that contributed to academic success for the common themes. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of the students and the middle school that they attend.

What Are Some Challenges and Solutions for Accomplishing Academic Success?

Challenges. Both of the participants discussed many challenges that African American males face today in achieving academic success in today's society. For many African American males, their belief in the educational system is a challenge, because they become disconnected from the school society, they give up on their educational hopes and dreams. These findings agree with Tatum (2009) who suggested that African American males can be disconnected with school as early as third grade and that lack of connection can continue throughout school. Furthermore, the findings reflect the need of being able to recognize that African American males require more particular attention to their success and academic development because of the exceptional barriers and gaps that lay within their educational development. The participants expressed that educators need to understand their cultural environment in order to be able to understand who they are and to be able to support them more academically. Both of the participants in this study identified similar challenges, as well as some additional challenges affecting the academic success of African American males. Some of the challenges included a lack of belief in self, non-caring teachers, a lack of confidence from other educators, as well as a lack of intrinsic motivation.

These participants stated that they realize that society has a negative opinion of African American males. They felt that these negative opinions could affect their belief

in their ability to succeed. Also, negative opinions can result from listening to their favorite rap artists. These negative opinions may confuse African American males and affect how they perceive themselves. This type of perception can lead to a negative mindset that will affect their ability to succeed. Another challenge was the lack of afterschool community activities and programs that would keep African American males off the streets. The participants recognized the lack of community activities and programs that provide opportunity gaps for African American males and become full circle because they get involved in gangs, drugs and violence.

They also felt that the absence of African American male teachers from their educational development tampered with academic success and cultural development among African American males. African American male teachers could serve as mentors and role models in schools and provide the cultural perspective of other African American males in order to model positive attitudes and behaviors. This seemed to be necessary to African American males that did not have a positive African American male role model.

Solutions. The participants that were a part of this study cited many solutions that were important to their academic success: self-belief, hard work, self-motivation, goal setting, peer and parental support, mentors and role models, caring educators, and safe and positive environments. They had a belief in their ability to succeed and were motivated to complete middle school with high grading marks, attend high school with continued high standards, and attend college. They felt that by them having high standards for academic success is what would be the answer of their future success. Evidence of this portion of the study, agreed with Ladson-Billings (2009) research stating

that participants believed that grades were reflective to their attitudes and behaviors. The assistant principal at Queen Middles School was considered an excellent leader. She was praised for her commitment, dedication, support, and confidence that all students had the ability to succeed. They were proud to have someone like her, who took time to encourage them to stay focused on their academic goals, as well as provide a safe and positive environment for all students. According to Tatum (2009) and Kunjufu (2014) when African American male students have a positive relationship with school administrators and teachers, the students look at the education system in a positive way and will do what they need to do in order to be academically success.

Conclusion

The students' perceptions revealed their understanding of academic success. They associated academic success to receiving an education. Both of the participants had a vivid impression of how their life would be after accomplishing their goals of obtaining a great education. Overall, the results led the researcher to be able to conclude that successful African American males were motivated to succeed because of their self-determination for a better lifestyle. They both remained focused on their goals and they were aware of their destination following middle school. Based on the findings, the researcher found five major factors that African American male students perceived to have contributed to their academic success. These factors were

1. Parental support and encouragement
2. Supportive and caring teachers
3. Supportive peers
4. A learning community where there was understanding of cultural background

5. Proactive community initiatives supporting youth with an emphasis on young black male mentoring.

The participants did acknowledge that the support and encouragement that they received from their parents were very influential in their achieving academic success. The parents that stayed involved in their child's education, motivated them to stay focused. They realized the value that their parents placed on their education and thus, they too, now have a greater appreciation. The parents constantly reminded the African American males of their responsibility to get a great education if they wanted to be successful in life.

Positive teacher and student relationships bring students into the learning process that strengthens their desire to want to learn. The participants viewed educators as being able to recognize their achievements, caring about meeting their educational needs, believing in them and encouraging them to do their best in all subject areas. The two African American males had a positive relationship with their teachers. They were encouraged by their teachers to work to their highest potential. In addition, their school assistant principal praised them and reminded them that they were capable of achieving whatever goal they set for their selves. As for the teachers, they were willing to help them because they put forth effort to complete their assignments that were assigned.

Positive relationships with their peers were related to their pursuit in their academic achievement. Although the participants did realize the existence of a possible negative influence, both of the youth reported that they were in a positive peer environment and that they really do not have friends that are negative. They stated that they have positive relationships with like-minded students and with similar educational

goals. The peers influence supported positive behavior, such as studying and preparing for tests. Also, trust and confidence were important factors among the peers. In this study, the African American males' peers were very supportive in their academic pursuit.

An understanding of African American male's cultural environment, and addressing their diversity in the curriculum, allowed the students to connect to their learning environment. It was important for African American males to have their culture understood by the educators that are servicing them. Educators must understand the African American males' environment in order to understand their identity. The attitudes of educators towards the African American male cultural upbringing and environment will allow educators to meet the needs of the African American males.

This researcher concluded that there is a critical need to provide support to African American males through mentoring and more positive community activities. The support from more African American male models in the schools and in the community would give African American males someone to identify with and assist in their personal development. These findings led the researcher to conclude that involvement in community activities will keep African American males more focused and motivated to stay away from everyday anomalies that are happening in today's society.

This research emphasized that African American male students need to be able to feel cared about, understood, supported and encouraged by teachers, parents, and peers in order to be academically successful. Parental involvement, cultural understanding, and positive community involvement in their educational experiences were also cited as necessary for academic success. The findings led this researcher to conclude that it is imperative for those involved with the education of African American males to lend

positive support, in order to keep these students motivated about academic success.

There are clearly many components affecting student performance, but it takes caring teachers, involved parents, and the community to help African American males to perform well. This researcher concludes that the school is the best chance for changing the negative perceptions of educational trends for African American males and will require parents, schools, and the community to collaborate more in order to bring t more academic success for African American males.

SECTION SIX

A Vision of Success

The academic challenges African American male students are facing in today's schools setting suggests that there is an urgent need for an intervention plan involving educators, parents, and the community. The participants that were a part of this study perceived that these stakeholders have a direct effect on African American males' academic success.

There are many implications on how key stakeholders can improve the academic success of African American male students from this study. First, educators should be more vocal in encouraging and motivating African American males to succeed. The participants clearly indicated that they responded well academically when their teachers showed interest by encouraging them to succeed. African American male students need educators who will encourage and promote their academic progress and success. As studies cited earlier in this research, nurturing teachers influenced students' achievement. In the final analysis, teacher showed a sincere interest and concern for the progress of these African American male students will for enhancing their learning.

Secondly, the key stakeholders must have a greater understanding that the road to academic success is often turbulent for African American males. As such, strong school leaders should hold professional development training on cultural diversity, and the effects of negative stereotyping faced by African American males. By incorporating this professional development, it will strengthen the educator's ability to teach and understand diverse learners.

Third, the perceptions of parental participation are of extreme importance and parents should be held at the same standards of accountability when it comes to their child's academics. It should be mandatory for parents to participate in all academics. Also, community involvement was reported to be extremely important for academic success. The findings suggested that parental involvement in school activities and collaboration between school, parents, and community had a positive effect on the academic achievement for African American males. To further the success of African American males' academic attainment, the implication is that schools need to develop a strategic plan for collaborating with parents and the community, to encourage African American males to persevere.

Fourth, mentorship is an important factor in helping African American males plot a course for academic excellences. School leaders should make it mandatory that African American male students are paired up with a male mentor from the community or high school officials. They also should make sure all staff are responsive to the challenges and needs of African American male students who are described, in this study, and of facing a number of challenges. The participants in this study indicated that they would benefit academically by having more African American male and female teachers as role models. They perceived that African American male and female teachers would motivate them to excel academically. The presumption is the school leaders formulate a plan to hire a large number of African American male and female teachers that will serve as role models and positively influence African American male students.

The observation from the demographic profiles provided by the participants is particularly noteworthy. First, although the students' demographic data was not included

in the findings, it served to provide additional information about these participants. It was noted from the demographics profiles that both participants, participated in a variety of clubs and activities as school and outside of school. This observation suggests that these students were able to balance successful academics and extracurricular activities. They expressed how involvement in extracurricular activities helped them remain focused and provided a distraction outlet from negative street activities. It seems that from the research that the participation in sports or clubs play an important role in student academic success. This implies that school leaders and teachers should devise a plan to encourage African American males to become involved in some type of extracurricular activities either at school or outside of the school. The indication is that extracurricular activities give students a focus and a chance to be involved in another positive aspect of school or in the community. School leaders should devise a plan to involve all teachers in African American male students' extracurricular activities.

From the demographic profiles, both of the participants' goals was to complete middle school and to do well in high school. They indicated that their parents encouraged them to stay focused in school and to get a good education. This suggests to the researcher that goal is an important ingredient for striving towards academic excellence. The implication is for parents and teachers to work together to inspire African American males to set goals early on in their academic career, which will give them an opportunity to work towards being successful in all educational aspects.

The NCLB Act ensured that school leaders would be accountable for the academic success of all students. School leaders should facilitate a strategic plan that would improve the students' achievement for those students who were having a challenge

in the educational system. The findings from this study provide several suggestions for stakeholders to incorporate meaningful strategies and positive attitudes in order to push African American males to greater academic success. The findings from this research challenged the way that parents, school leaders, and teachers interact with African American male students. Therefore, it is suggested that school leaders formulate a policy and strategic plan with all stakeholders to get input on what each one can do to service African American male students.

This research provided important insight in to the need for all stakeholders to become more knowledgeable and sensitive to the needs of the African American male students. There was a need to conduct this research with the targeted population by focusing directly on collecting data on academic success from the perspective of the African American male students.

SECTION SEVEN

Strategies and Actions for Change

The researcher suggests the following actions take place for potential school leaders and all teachers dealing with African American male students. The suggestion for this research study will possibly provide needed information to assist today's school leaders and teachers in determining how to capture the unused academic potentials of many African American male students on a daily and yearly basis.

In order to bring a change, the following action plan should be developed and implemented:

1. Further research needs to be done in order to examine the African American male students who were not successful in their academics while they were in the eighth grade, in order to determine the gap between the perceptions of academically successful African American male students and the unsuccessful African American male students. A more detailed study could be done to research the socio-economic background, family educational background, family values on education, and the benefit of students' involvement in extracurricular activities within the school or community. This type of research could also provide vital information revealing why so many African American male students drop out of high school during their freshmen year. Also, examining the attitude that African American male students have towards education and their views on academic success is possible future research. A study of this nature could provide more information on the power of the mental attitude and self-motivation among the African American males, as far as their view of what it takes to become successful in academics

and if education is even worth their time. It would examine more of the students psych mind.

2. Research should also be conducted on the effects of the involvement of African American males' parents and their relationship with the school staff. Also, the study can explore what it means to the African American male students to have their parents involved in their schooling practices.

3. Further research should be done to examine factors that African American males consider to be factors that affect their academic success, as well as, white males' academic success. By considering this research, this information could show the relationship between academic attitudes and academic success of two racial groups.

4. As noted prominently in this study, African American males would benefit from strong role models. The formation of an African American male mentor coalition assigned to meet regularly with African American male eight graders and high school students in the education setting and outside of it, should commence with all due speed. Taking the students with them to their workplaces, and into their homes undoubtedly be a positive experience.

There are many problems plaguing the African American community. Mentorship is a way to address the many problems that are happening that is plaguing the lives of African American male students. When educational institutions partner with organizations like 100 Black Men of America, it helps with exploring ways to improve conditions community and the lives of African American male students. Mentorship programs could be away to build positive relationship with community organizations and police agencies.

5. A school within a school pilot concept should be implemented where a group of twenty-five 9th-grade African American male students would be scheduled for all their classes with African American male educators. Having a school within a school could target those African American male students that are successful and unsuccessful academically. These cohorts of students could have a tailored curriculum that focuses on African American history and culture from ancient civilization to the civil rights movement and onto contemporary media. All the classes could be taught by African American male educators whose own experiences and perspectives could provide a great understanding and lifelong learning

6. A school-business partnership where African American males are placed in co-op businesses would further advance school to work success. When African American male students are introduced in school to work programs, it gives them an idea of the career path that they would like to explore, as well as, what it takes in to achieve the desired goal. This would allow African American male students to build positive relationships and to gain another mentor that could help them throughout their educational path.

7. Lastly, further research recommendation for this study is to examine the effects of community, church, school, and civic groups on the academic development of African American males. By conducting this type of research, this information could lend support for the community leaders to initiate more programs and activities to help support African American males. When African American male students are a part of an organized community and attend church on a regular basis and have a relationship with the pastor, tend to be academically successful. African American male students tend to

have a high grade point average and take more entrance exams to attend college, because it provides the student with support and encouragement.

Because so many African American male students are considered to be latchkey child, it is important that they are involved in some type of civic groups, like The Boys and Girls Clubs of America. When African American male students are involved in civic groups they are least likely to get involved in negative behaviors and are motivated to be a part of more positive activities and teams that continues to develop their character. According to The Boys and Girls Clubs of America's research their goal is to provide a safe and positive environment for all youth, fun, supportive relationships, great learning opportunities, and recognize the positive within the youth. Today's African American male students need to be a part of an organization, because it reduces dropout rates, skipping school, and provides an outage for them to go afterschool, in order to keep them away from the everyday dismay of life.

Strategy for a Dream

In order to provide strategies to address the numerous factors motivational factors for academic achievement among African American male students, it is important to have a great form of understanding of how individuals, parental, and school-related factors contribute to their academic achievement. It is imperative to understand that the attitude and expectations of educators, can contribute to African American male students felling motivated to learn. It is know that, schools that are successful gain that success because they have concept of high expectations for all students, regardless of their color or gender. The educators in that learning environment is about motivating all students to work to their highest potential and are pushing all students to success. When African

American male students feel as though the educator cares and they trust the educator, they will do whatever it takes not to disappoint that educator; regardless if the educator is male or female, black or white, all the students will perform at their highest level because they feel motivated by that teacher to do so.

There needs to be an understanding of the African American male students' cultural environment and being able to address their diversity in the curriculum would allow students to connect to the learning environment. It is important for African American male students to have their culture understood by all educators regardless of their race. Educators need to understand African American male students' environment in order to understand their identity. The educator's attitudes and behavior toward African American males' cultural upbringing and environment will enable educators to meet the needs of their African American male students.

It is important for potential educators and school leaders to understand how to capture the unused academic potentials of the many African American male students that are being serviced in their learning institutions. Future research needs to be assessed to examine African American male students who were unsuccessful in the academics while in middle school to determine the gap between perceptions of academically successful African American male students and unsuccessful students. The socioeconomic background, family educational background, family values on education and students involvement in extracurricular activities in school and the community could be taken into account. When African American male students are encouraged and challenged they seem to work harder to achieve in academics because participation in extracurricular is

contingent on their grades. Yet, they also need to have hope that they can accomplish academic and extracurricular success, with the efforts of the school community.

When attempting to succeed academically, it is that inner drive or motivation that pushes you beyond your own measures. African American male students need that inner drive to have them strive to become academically sound. Education is important in the lives of African American male students and it takes every element of the community to help push these youth to academic greatness, it is an avenue out of their current environment. The *village* concept is the thing that is most missing in the lives of so many African American male students; they need to realize that the community that they are apart cares for their academics. “It takes a village to raise children,” is an old African Proverb that many people used for decades when focusing on African American children. Now today that concept is long gone and now there are so many African American male students be completely controlled and being a part of their environment. Being academically successful is no longer a drive that many African American male students desire. Even though, these students realize that the sky is the limit when it comes to education, they still need encouragement in order to promote academic success.

Today there are many challenges that African American male students have to contend with in society. For many African American male students the educational system is a challenge, and they become disconnected from education and start to give up on their hopes and dreams and when that happens, the youth has two choices, education or jail, there is no longer a middle ground. African American male students require a particular amount of attention when it comes to educational success. Which requires the

whole community, including parents, school leaders, and educators to help them develop their self-worth.

Conclusion

African American male students need to feel cared about, supported, encouraged, and understood by all stakeholders. Cultural understanding and awareness needs to be made aware of in order for these students to have a feeling of accomplishment. It is imperative that those who are involved in the education of African American male students be cognitive of be positive and seeing them as individuals. They need that positive support in order to have to ambition to see themselves succeeding academically. Which entails many different components: caring educators, involved parents, mentors, and community partnerships. The educational institution is the best chance to help bring about a change for the negative perspectives that African American male students see, just by changing the attitudes of the ones that are in contact with them on a daily basis.

A lot of the academic problems that African American male students are facing are often associated with a lack of understanding of their cultural identity, inadequate academic preparation, their disconnect from the mainstream society, negative stereotypes, and lack of positive role models in the home the school, and the community. These academic and social challenges must be addressed. This seems to be a strong indication that school leaders and educators need to be more aware of these challenges in order to formulate strategies of how to best support academic development among African American male students.

The participants in this study had great aspirations of successful attending high school and going on to college. Each participant set a goal and they each planned for

their future, which did not include failure. This researcher felt that the solution for improving academic success seems relatively simple, that is to make sure that all school leaders and educators are trained in cultural relevance which details training of culture on African American male students. The participants that were involved in this study were very knowledgeable about what they needed in life and articulated clearly what caused them to have success academically. They African American male students that were a part of this study possessed qualities of intellect, self-confidence, and pride. The questions that were proposed can be of help to school leaders and educators in their quest of helping to African American male students succeed.

The perceptions of African American males academic achievement is lacking. Therefore, more research needs to be conducted in order to provide educators and school leaders with suggested information regarding how best to support the academic development of African American male students. Furthermore, the findings from this study can fuel a discussion for more research that may lead to a cycle of fostering a generation of high achievers among this population of students.

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PART THREE

ERADICATING CYBERBULLYING THROUGH THE DEVELOPMENT OF ETHNICAL AND CLEAR POLICY AND PROCEDURES IN LEARNING COMMUNITIES

SECTION ONEV

Vision Statement

Personal Understanding of Cyberbullying

I remember the first time that I heard about cyberbullying. One of my daughters was in middle school and the other two were in elementary. When I picked them up from school they were talking about a young boy by the name of Ryan Patrick Halligan that had killed himself because he was being bullied. At first, I thought that this young boy attended their school, but I was wrong. The case of what happened to this teenager was all over the news both locally and internationally. I was completely saddened and upset this happened to this teenager. Additionally, the circumstances had made my daughters completely distraught.

When my youngest daughter started high school, she experienced being bullied via the computer. She had a MySpace page and there were several young ladies that would threaten her daily. I did not understand, but I was an active parent and it was my job to protect my daughter. I remember how she wanted to attend another high school because of this issue. Well, I refused to allow those young ladies to win. I went to the school and complained about what was happening to her. It was a battle because the young ladies were refusing to admit what they were doing to her. It was a back and forth

battle and I was getting frustrated and my daughter was getting tired of the constant harassment. Finally, I got proof that of what they were doing to my daughter.

My eldest and middle daughter came to me and showed me my youngest daughter's MySpace page. I was livid and frustrated about what these young ladies had said. I had to think about what I was going to do. I talked to my daughters about the post, I thought fast and copied and pasted everything that they said, before they could erase it. I wanted to post a comment so bad that I had to walk away from the computer screen. Well, the following day I was at the school and talking to one of the school administrators Mrs. Gonzalez-Edwards. All the young ladies that were involved in cyberbullying incident were suspended from school and a parent conference was setup. In the end, everything worked out and it became a thing of the past, but every issue of cyberbullying does not have a happy ending.

World News Event of Cyberbullying

Ryan Patrick Halligan could be described as a typical 13 year-old trying to make his way through his troubling adolescent years. Ryan frequently encountered, on/off, bullying situations since he was in the fifth grade. Other than one fistfight that Ryan had encountered, his parents tried to help him through those difficult times. They believed that the problems he had been experiencing were normal and under control. Like most children his age, Ryan loved being online. During the summer of 2003, he had been spending a great deal of time alone in his room instant messaging online. Unbeknownst to his parents and to himself, Ryan did not know that he had befriended one of the students who had previously bullied him. While developing this friendship, Ryan invested a lot of trust in his new friend. He made the mistake of sharing personal

information regarding things that he experienced and could potentially be somewhat embarrassing if exposed to the public. The student whom Ryan shared this embarrassing information with, betrayed his trust and began to spread rumors, online and offline, insinuating Ryan was gay. Due to this espousing of information, Ryan had to endure teasing and taunting from many of his peers.

Regardless of Ryan's experience, his desire to gain friendship impeded his judgment. Later on, Ryan befriended a girl from the same school online with hopes of helping with the rumors; but she was not his friend either. Publicly she called Ryan a loser and told her friends that she was only joking with him online. Her friendship with Ryan online was a deceitful endeavor of getting him to share some personal and embarrassing things. She had succeeded. The same girl shared this information with many of her classmates. As a result, cyberbullying got so intense that Ryan started exhibiting his suicide plans with others online.

On October 7, 2003, while Ryan's father was away on business and everybody in the house was asleep. Perhaps building up to this climax more he hung himself in the family's bathroom. Following his death, his father was able to use a computer program to obtain the transcripts of some of the online conversations. In addition to the consistent online bullying, there were conversations with other students in which suicide was encouraged. Even though Ryan came from a loving and supportive family, his online social life disrupted his stability.

Today the internet has become a principle part of our daily lives. Many would say that they could not live without it. According to Lenhart (2001), millions of youth between the ages of twelve and seventeen use the Internet on a daily basis. It is estimated

that 97% of today's youth are connected in some way with some device to the Internet (Ybarra, 2004). Social networking and online communication have become major conduits in the life of today's teenagers', impacting all of their social interactions (Lenhart, 2001). Today, teenagers primarily use the internet as a tool to enhance their social status by being able to maintain their friendships and having the ability to build new relationships (Gross, 2004). According to Bargh, McKenna and Fitzsimons (2002) the Internet has become a common tool utilized by school-aged students, because it is believed to be a stress-free way to make friends.

The internet provides a platform enabling people to hide behind the veil of secrecy to school-aged children may be a useful social crutch for those that are not sociable in person. It also has the ability to open up doors for the misuse of technology as children can say and do anything that they would normally not do in person. This can prove harmful in many instances because this method of interaction can embolden some children to experiment in aggressive behaviors. For example, children can start to carry weapons, such as knives and guns, they can start to become very explosive over minor incidents and begin to become physical. Ybarra and Mitchell (2004) states plainly, that despite the many wondrous beauties of the internet, it is considered the new form of bullying, cyberbullying. Cyberbullying is considered a large problem in many educational institutions today, because now students have access to Facebook, Instagram, and twitter, where they can hide their identity.

Cyberbullying is still a relatively new phenomenon, but the data in existence indicates that the negative effects of cyberbullying are at similar to those of more traditional forms of bullying (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004). It is important to take a look at

the effects of traditional bullying in order to gain insight of cyberbullying. Traditional bullying is an imbalance of power. Traditional bullying is a means of gaining and sustaining power and demonstrates what occurs when one person imposes their power on their victim. Even with the infancy of cyberbullying, traditional bullying has been a deeply embedded problem in schools throughout the world (Roland, 2001).

According to Cartwright (1995), bullying used to be looked upon as something that was irrelevant, as victimization helped to toughen up children. Olweus (2015) described a bullying victim as someone who is subjected to aggressive actions from someone and who is more dominant than they are than someone who is bullied when one or more students repeatedly expose them to negative actions. Bullying research has continued to grow over the years, it has become evident that the negative effects of bullying can range anywhere from relatively minor to extremely severe. The list of physical and emotional effects of bullying includes headaches, but are not limited to stomachaches, tiredness, depression, anxiety, delinquency, truancy, social isolation, sleep disorders, and possibly even suicide (Cullerton, & Crick, 2005). Although, the prevalence of bullying decreases as people grow older, victims who have not properly addressed their problems that have manifested due to bullying have a higher level of academic failure (Leff, 1999). These emotional and physical effects do not always remain in adolescence; they can often carry over until their adulthood (Batsche and Knoff, 1994).

Unfortunately, according to Hinduja (2009) few children ever report that they are being bullied. School officials are often unaware of the prevalence of bullying in their own institution (Cornell, 2004). Many children in middle school often fail to report

bullying behaviors because they believe it will not be solved and that they would be blamed for the incident. This may be attributed to the perception of many children who believe bullying behaviors are often tolerated or ignored by school officials, or that teachers rarely detect or intervene in the incidents (Skiba & Fontanini, 2001) even if the bullying takes place in the classroom. There is a clear disconnect between students, teachers, and administrators, which only expresses the urgency for attention and action on the topic. The need to address bullying, is de-emphasized students feel less safe and satisfied in schools in which have high incidents of bullying reported (Olweus, 2015).

As technology has become fully integrated into the lives of children, the negative effects of life online are becoming more clearly identified. There is an excessive amount of time spent online and can lead to increased loneliness and depression (Nie & Ebring, 2000). The more time spent in cyberspace, the more likely that children are to lose sight with their social environment (Nie & Ebring, 2002). These emotional changes can lead to online victimization, now referred to as cyberbullying, which became widespread around 2004 (Phillips, 2004). Cyberbullying was defined by Beasley (2004) as the “use of information and communication technologies such as emails, cell phone, text messages, and instant messaging, in which hostile behavior by an individual or group, is intended to bring about harm to others.”

Even though researchers have not yet fully examined the nature of cyberbullying (Beran, 2005), its anonymous nature can often lead to interchangeable roles, in which individuals can be considered a bully or victim (Ybarra, 2004). These acts of cyberbullying usually take place away from school, they are a growing problem for many schools throughout the nation, because actions that had taken place online previously

often play out in person the next day at the school (Lacey, 2007). Alarming statistics indicate that incidents of cyberbullying are becoming quite more common.

According to Strom (2005), cyberbullying can be more devastating than the traditional form of bullying due to the much larger audience online and because a child's home is no longer their safe haven (McClung, 2006). Furthermore, the anonymity of the internet allows a bully to be more abusive online than they would be in person. Even though information is starting to become more readily available regarding the prevalence of cyberbullying, there is still limited research indicating the best way to deal with the issue.

One of the reasons the issue of cyberbullying started to receive so much attention is because the news is starting to report more cases of teenage suicide as a result of incessant cyberbullying. While incidents of suicide due to cyberbullying are considered rare, reported and well-documented cases make it evident that there is a dire need for action. There needs to be an increased awareness on the topic and policies need to be in place on the educational level, to ensure that stories such as those of Ryan Patrick Halligan are not repeated in the near future (ABC News, 2010).

According to the policy that Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) has in place concerning the matter of bullying, it gives a clear definition of what bullying is considered and the different levels that is associated with the definition. However, there are still students in the district that are being treated the same way as Ryan Patrick Halligan. He was one normal teenager that had dreams and goals, but because there were not appropriate measures taken, the effects of bullying were detrimental and contributed to his death. Unfortunately, stories similar to those of Ryan Patrick Halligan are

becoming more common for teens. Even though not all cases of cyberbullying end as suicide, the literature supports that negative effects of cyberbullying are numerous. The problem is steadily becoming more severe, and schools need to find ways to address the problem in order to help their students.

This type of issue interrupts education on a daily basis. More and more students within MPS are exhibiting this type of behavior of becoming victims of cyberbullying on social media. The fear is that they could be lost in the system, if there is not a change in the policy when it comes to addressing the one/s that are causing the harm. There is great deal of disconnect when it comes to school level administrators dealing with the issues of cyberbullying. Many administrators will state to the students that they cannot deal with community issues. There needs to be a better policy in place in order for MPS

SECTION TWO

Analysis of Need

Introduction

Throughout the recent decade, cyberbullying has become an important issue in the educational world, especially among middle and high school students. There are many different behaviors that are associated with this type of behavior. The issue of cyberbullying is difficult to understand because this is a recent phenomenon. It has become a hot topic for many communities, parents, educational institutions, and lawmakers, but most of the data that has been collected on this issue is considered an underdeveloped picture of the prevalence of the problem (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009). Cyberbullying has become alarming because the perpetrators are able to permeate into an area where the victims of their torment have no way to escape the harassment. There

have been many debates over who has jurisdiction in dealing with the issues of cyberbullying because most have no jurisdiction online. There is a persistent belief that schools are obligated to address the issues that are associated with harassment, since it is considered to affect the educational environment (Feinberg & Robey, 2009). In fact, according to Hinduja and Patchin (2010) studies show that when school children are involved in cyberbullying incidents, they perceive a poorer climate at their schools than those children who have not been victimized by cyberbullying.

Additionally, to Hinduja and Patchin (2010), it is extremely important to understand that most cyberbullies are individuals that have had a personal relationship with their victims. In fact, a recent study completed by the Children's Home and Society of America, showed that 80 % of cyberbullying victims knew their harasser; whereas, approximately 20% of the victims did not know the identity of the harasser. Many researchers have stated that many victims of cyberbullying are also likely to use social media to bully others (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010). Statistics support that many school children that have been a victim of cyberbullying, have also been victims to traditional bullying (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010). These students become isolated, misunderstood, and depressed when it comes to their school environment. They feel as though they have no support or guidance from school teachers and administrators (Wells & Mitchell, 2008). These victims would feel sad and depressed about their situation and were prone to hurt themselves. They were more likely to bring weapons to school for protection or retaliation (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010). According to Juvonen & Gross (2008), most cyberbullying victims that reported retaliation reportedly retaliated at school and not cyber space.

For instances, Hinduja and Patchin (2010) and many other researchers indicated that the majority of cyberbullying cases occur with older students, starting with middle school aged children with very little cyberbullying being reported in elementary school. When analyzing the gender influences on cyberbullying, it has become inconclusive. Many researchers have reported that girls are more subjective to be involved in cyberbullying incidents. Regardless of the susceptible demographics, cyberbullying cases have increased throughout the past 10 years. Many issues of cyberbullying continue to be unknown and many studies relate to the prevalence of the problem. While the percentages vary, it is clear that cyberbullying is an extraordinarily prevailing factor in the social lives of today's youth. In a study by Hinduja and Patchin (2010) of over 2000 teens, 20% reported being victims of online bullying, about 11% reported bullying others online, and 28% have reported witnessing cyberbullying.

Educational Analysis

Many school officials are starting to become more familiar with the term of cyberbullying and its effects, but many are still challenged with how they should respond when incidents of cyberbullying are reported to them. Even though suspension, expulsion, or police contact may happen, school officials are obligated to respond with the necessary discretion. When school officials take the report serious, it may alleviate stress that the student may develop from the incident (Hindujua & Patchin, 2010). Many school procedures, ask for the students to turn their cell phones off, but it's not practical or realistic that they will do that, so schools need to implement a written policy that systematically outlines a consistent approach to dealing with these types of problems. For example, there is an announcement daily via the PA system that all students are

required to turn off their cellular devices. If they are caught on their cellular devices they will be taken, but the school has no written policy to effectively substantiate this procedure.

When school officials are aware of a case that is dealing with cyberbullying, schools should make sure that the victim is safe (Hinduja & Patchin 2010). School officials should gather as much information as possible regarding the case. They must make sure that they involve all parents and if necessary, law enforcement. The school should make sure that they contact their central office supervisors if they are considering a long-term removal from the school or district. As the issue of cyberbullying becomes relevant and its influence surfaces; administrative implementation of action are mandatory. Many researchers such as Campbell (2005), stress that in order to improve the likelihood that students will report incidents of cyberbullying, school officials should take all incidents seriously and work diligently with all parents and students to adequately resolve the problem.

As the issue of cyberbullying has gained much attention through the media, many school districts have responded by adding a policy in their school policies. Since schools cannot simply ban students from having cell phones or any other electronic devices with access to the internet it is difficult to enforce the policy. The district has a responsibility to protect themselves from liability by making sure that they have a comprehensive policy that clearly defines, prohibits, and outlines the consequences for cyberbullying and other forms of electronic harassments (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010). Many people and school officials state that schools and districts cannot monitor cyberbullying behavior because it takes place off of the school grounds. This is the reason that it is important

that policies must be in place to educate students with the consequences of online harassment and how it carries over to the schools the next day (Brown et al, 2006). Schools that are proactive on their approach to cyberbullying and whose policies include providing education, counseling, and a social outlet, are going to be much more successful in reducing the prevalence of cyberbullying and the subsequent effects that it brings on the victim (Hinduja & Patchin 2010).

Researchers Juvonen and Gross (2008) stated that in order to gain the trust of the students that schools are servicing, school policies must strictly state and enforce intolerance of any form of harassment or intimidation. The climate of the school can have great impact on the effectiveness of the schools being proactive. Schools have to provide an empathetic and understanding environment where students feel comfortable talking to adults about any situations that may arrive through the course of the school year (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010). There is a generational gap that exists due to the lack of technology understanding and many students are not comfortable talking with adults when it comes to incidents such as cyberbullying. According to Juvonen and Gross (2008), until the gap narrows, students are going to remain hesitant to talk about the incident openly with authority figures. Where it has been openly communicated to students that school officials will take their concerns serious, students report that they are more likely to go to a school official that they trust to handle the situation without bringing blame to the victim.

Many of the problems that schools and school districts have with establishing policies is that they ban cyberbullying and outline the punishment for engaging in that type of behavior. Yet Shariff (2004) states that this is a necessary component of any

policy, but engaging in military style zero tolerance can be ineffective and potentially counterproductive. Hinduja and Patchin (2010) believe that it is currently unclear whether or not these threats of punitive sanctions have any effect at all on the victimizer. However, it is clear that all schools and districts have to have some form of a written policy in place if they intend in implementing any consequences for cyberbullying. Many schools that have not kept their behavioral policies up to date have struggled to implement long-term behavioral consequences when an incident of cyberbullying occurs (Boucek, 2009).

Researcher Ford (2009), feels that there is no perfectly clear solution to stopping cyberbullying and that passing responsibility on the issue is not an effective approach to preventing cyberbullying from occurring. There are not any cyberbullying programs current in place that have been fully studied for effectiveness, but there has been many programs created in order to combat traditional bullying that have been found to work (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010). Although the research on those programs have been found to be successful, many researchers (Ford, 2009) feel that methods that were used to stop traditional bullying, could also be effective to combat cyberbullying.

Even though the effectiveness of cyberbullying prevention programs are unknown, there are many steps that school officials should be taking to ensure that their cyberbullying policies address the needs of all their students and not just the students that are victims of the incident. All school administrators need to ensure that all school rules include specific language about cyberbullying and the consequences that are associated with any bullying offenses. They should work diligently with teachers, parents, and students in order to raise awareness of the problem (Brunner & Lewis, 2009). Hinduja

and Patchin (2010) believe that effective school policies should; specifically define all possible means of harassment, that the punishments should increase dramatically, education should be provided to all the aggressors, policies should include specific language that addresses off-school site incidents, a reporting procedure should be established, and an outline of how reports should be investigated should be established. It is important that the policies that are put into place, should stress values, kindness, and restorative justice in order to prevent cyberbullying from occurring (Campbell, 2009). Campbell also believes that districts or states should adopt a universal policy, schools should develop and implement one within their district parameter that meets the needs of their own school population. Because parental involvement is a key factor in most facets of education, it is recommended that cyberbullying be apart of the school Acceptable Use Policy (AUP), also that parents be required to sign the AP as well as for the students (Brown, 2006). The AUP is a document that defines the acceptable use for students to use the school network system, computer, and other technology resources. It is supposed to allow students to be able to use the internet in a safe and responsible manner.

Social Analysis

There has been an extensive amount of research done on the issue of cyberbullying, but not enough has been conducted to help understand the effects that cyberbullying has on school children mentally. Cyberbullying becomes a permanent cyberattack once it is introduced to the outside world, the victims start to experience depression and other types of mental disorders (Cassidy, Jackson, & Brown, 2009). Many researchers have concluded that, at the very least, youth who are targeted by cyberbullying seem to display negative reactions that are similar to those youth that are

victims of traditional bullying (Beran & Li, 2007). It could be argued that the effects of cyberbullying are more dangerous than the traditional offensives of bullying, since the person doing the bullying cannot be seen and the victim cannot easily escape the wrath and torment of the offender (Cassidy, et al., Brown, 2009). Victimization of cyberbullying can disrupt the adolescent emotional and social development as they move on into their adult life (Raskauskas & Stoltz, 2007). According to researchers, (Patchin, 2012) 20% of children who are victims of cyberbullying, have an increased chance of experiencing suicidal thoughts and is clearly linked to them developing deviant behaviors as shoplifting, dropping out of school, drug use, and violent behaviors such as fighting.

Cyberbullying does not take place in person, the attack on the individual can take place at anytime. Electronic messaging can be distributed to a wide variety of audience in such a short amount of time, that children vulnerability is heightened. The anonymity that accompanies the distribution of the messages or pictures can be different for both the victim and perpetrator, because the aggressor cannot see the reaction of the victim and their audience. Since the aggressors cannot see a reaction from their victims or the audience, cyberbullying according to Feinburg and Robey (2009) is worse than face-to-face bullying because the perpetrators increase their intensity and frequency of their attacks without fully realizing the ramifications of their actions.

Political Analysis

The implementation of cyberbullying policies is not solely the responsibility of the school, but it is also the responsibility of the district and policymakers. District and policymakers are urged to revise the language that is in the current policies to include

various forms of electronic harassment, which should include language anticipating what cyberbullying may look like (Brown, 2006). For example, since sexting (sending sexual explicit photo, images via text messages or emails) is a new and upcoming issue and a extreme phenomenon for students, policymakers would be urged to look at technological innovations that are in the works and include a clear definition and clear consequence for how this type of behavior would be dealt with (Boucek, 2009). It is important that policymakers take into account the fact that many parents do not possess the technical knowledge that their children do. According to Brown (2006) with parents not really being technically minded, policies should include parental education classes in order to educate parents on the entire new technical lingo. The effects of cyberbullying is felt by students, parents, school staff, school district, and the public, the development of a effective policy needs to be a collaborative effort by all stakeholders.

With more issues of cyberbullying increasing at a rapid speed, more states are requiring school districts to take a proactive approach with dealing with the issue. As of July of 2013, 18 states have either proposed or passed cyberbullying laws (Hinduja & Patchin, 2013). Regardless if the mandates have come from a higher level or not, all schools and districts should have a written policy that specifically defines cyberbullying. This document should include off-school incidents, delineate punishments, and identify proactive measures to be taken in order to reduce the behavior (Hinduja & Patchin, 2013; Brown, 2006; Campbell, 2005).

Moral and Ethical Analysis

According to Juvonen and Gross (2008) many schools have a fiduciary duty to make sure that their students are safe. There is ample justification for their involvement

in cases of cyberbullying that may originate away from school. Since many of the incidents are done off school grounds and are brought to school the next day, many schools could potentially face consequences for not acting in an appropriate manner when the case is reported (Smith, 2008; Brown, 2006). Administrators who fail to investigate and protect their students when their school does have a policy defining cyberbullying, which is an act that is defined as an deliberate indifference if a hostile environment is created, could be found legally liable (Trager, 2009). School leaders could also have consequences for responding inappropriately to cyberbullying aggressors (Brown, 2006). Meaning that some school leaders are bias towards other students and favor one over the other.

One of the earliest cases of bullying is in 1969 *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District*, which was a founding case which schools and districts support having jurisdiction over the behaviors of what occurred away from school. According to Trager (2009), the Tinker case of 1969, involved three schools that wore black armbands to school in protest of the Vietnam War. The school administrator decided to enforce a rule that students who wore the armbands would be suspended from school until they agreed to refrain from wearing the armbands in protest of the war. The three students continued to stand their ground and wore the armbands daily to school and in return they were issued a lengthy suspension. The incident was then taken to court and the court ultimately ruled in favor of the students. However, the impact of the case was the court determined that freedom of speech does not allow students the right to act in a manner that brings about a disruption in the school climate. The *Tinker* standard offers an appropriate tool for schools to proscribe cyberbullying policies and the disruption that it

brings to the learning environment (Trager, 2009). Of course many would feel as though the *Tinker* case is not an appropriate case when considering cyberbullying, but it is important to note that the case was supported because of the disruption that it brought to the learning environment and it is not supported by the freedom of speech.

It is assumed that educators would intervene in incidents where cyberbullying interferes with the educational environment (Hinduja & Patchin, 2013). The majority of case laws support the notion that even when the disruption occurs off school grounds (Trager, 2009), but there are a small amount of incidents in which courts have not supported the actions of schools when dealing with harassment that occurred off school grounds. For example, in the case of *Klein v. Smith* in 1986, a student was suspended for ten days because he extended his middle finger at a teacher while he was off school grounds. The student parents filed a lawsuit and prevailed because the courts determined that the student behavior did not significantly impact the learning environment.

Now the case that is more typical of cyberbullying was the case *Beussink v. Woodland School District* (1998), in this case the student was suspended from school for ten days for making posts on the web that included profanities towards the school administrator. In this case, the courts ruled that the school could not really impose discipline for an act that did not occur on school grounds. Conclusively, in the case of *Emmett v. Kent School District No 415*, the results did not end up favorably for many schools. In the case, a student was expelled from school for creating a website that included the opportunity for other students to vote on who should die next as well as mock obituaries for certain students. Even though the target audience was students from

the school, the court ruled against the school with the assumption that the website was setup outside of the school.

Court rulings like *Emmett v. Kent School District* and similar are rare. Many school district personnel are reluctant to get involved in cyberbullying cases out of the fear of legal repercussions. As Hinduja & Patchin stated (2013), schools need support of the court system to embrace jurisdiction of cases that originate away from school. Luckily, most court cases in the past decade have sided in favor of the schools and districts.

The case of *Doe v. Pulanski County Special School District* (2001) is an example of a case that the courts ruled in the favor of the school. In the case the court ruled in favor of the school when they considered a threatening letter that was stolen from the home of the writer and brought to school as an actual threat. The case of *J.S. v. Bethlehem Area School District* (2000) was about a student that created a web page that included hurtful and profane pieces of information about a certain teacher, including an inappropriate list of reasons why the teacher should be fired. The school expelled the student and the court upheld the expulsion because the web page created a disruption to the teacher and the entire school.

There are many court cases that are ruling in favor of the schools where violence can be involved and court case where school teachers are being denigrated publicly. For example, in the case of *Doninger v. Niehoff* (2007), a student created a blog that referred to the school administrator as a “douchebag” and to tell student to harass the administrator for a decision that had previously been made about a certain incident. Even though no direct threat of physical harm was made towards the administrator, the courts

ruled that the student's action caused a major disruption to the school community and thus supported the school's disciplinary action. In the case of *Wisniewski v. Board of Education of the Weedsport Central School District* (2007), in this case a student sent some of his friends, an electronic image of his English teacher being shot in the head. For that incident the student received a suspension and the courts supported the school because the student was aware that the image would cause a considerable amount of disruption to the learning environment.

Trends in the court rulings should ease the tension of teachers and school administrators. The big debate over the issue of freedom of speech still remains ambiguous to educators and school administrators, but the courts support disciplinary actions taken by administrators?

Cyberbullying behavior among today's youth has increasing concerns among middle, and high schools. Fueled by a number of high-profiled cyberbullying incidents, there is a heightened awareness that cyberbullying represents a serious problem for youth today. Research has revealed that the issue has lasting consequences for the victim and their family; because of that issue there is a call to action for the government and school district to devise an effective solution to counterattack the behavior of cyberbullying behavior both on and off school premises.

SECTION THREE

Advocated Policy Statement

Congress passed the Protecting Children in the twenty-first century legislation, in 2008, which protects children from traditional bullying and cyberbullying (Acker & Gable, 2011). Traditional bullying consists of negative acts that caused the victim to fear the aggressor or to have feelings of distress when in the presence of the aggressor (Holladay, 2010). In the past, bullying took place on the school playground, buses, in the school hallways, and in the school bathroom. Now, students can become a bully via electronic devices and social media with a layer of anonymity. Cyberbullying as well as traditional bullying, allows the perpetrator to be a part of the solution and not continue to be a part of the problem. In order for this to happen, there needs to be a more effective policy in place that all respective schools, within the district, can execute to bring about a more positive change in the school environment. A tougher policy needs to be in place in order to decrease the incidents of cyberbullying. For example, Messmer Catholic Schools policies have a nonnegotiable policy when it comes to harassment, bullying, and cyberbullying. Students that are involved in that type of behavior, whether it takes place inside the school environment or on the outside, are grounds for expulsion (Messmer, 2015).

Cyberbullying can be more pervasive than traditional bullying because, the perpetrator is using technological advances which means that a larger amount of people can be affected (Thomas & McGee, 2012). The infancy of cyberbullying impede the process of developing solutions because the solutions cannot keep up with the progression of technological advances in order to correct the behavior. Cyberbullying has become viewed as an urgent social, health, and education concern that has moved to the forefront of much public debate on school legislation and policy. While many researchers are beginning to see that the school climate and mental health of the students can be seriously compromised, there seems to be a significant need for research in order to further identify viable solutions in order to help prevent and respond to digital forms of harassment (Raskauskas & Stoltz, 2007). Many school districts are beginning to implement electronic forms of harassment as apart of the policies, but merely mentioning that cyberbullying is prohibited is not a proven method in dealing with the issue. Schools are in need of researched-based programs that are devised on how to deal with cyberbullying and to make sure that the program continues to be evaluated over time for effectiveness of the program (Ybarra, 2007).

Due to advancing technological communication and the growth of social networking, cyberbullying has added a new complex dimension to the problem of bullying. Cyberbullying is commonly known as the willful and repeated harm that is inflicted through the use of computers, cell phones, and other electronic devices (Hinduja & Patchin, 2013). There are several aspects of cyberbullying behaviors that increase its propensity to damage or harm the victims. According to Shariff (2009), physical distance between the students who bully and the targeted victims, have difficulty identifying the

perpetrators, which in return lessens personal accountability and encourages more cruel and abusive behavior. The use of technology transmit content to a wide audience, also it makes acts of cyberbullying highly visible, more pervasive and more permanent. Because cyberbullying is a relatively new phenomenon and the victimization usually occurs off school grounds, it imposes challenges to schools to effectively enforce policies without overreaching their legal authority (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010).

There is a lack of empirical evidence validating the effectiveness of cyberbullying intervention programs (Mason, 2008). Many adolescents feel that their schools do not adequately address the issue of cyberbullying, there will be a need for future research, in order to identify effective school policies that are working to prevent the issue of cyberbullying. It seems that more educators are beginning to gain a better understanding surrounding the issue of cyberbullying, but there are still gaps in learning how to prevent it from occurring and understanding the many harmful effects of the incidents (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2008).

Unfortunately, many case of cyberbullying are coming more common for teenagers. Many of the cases can end up with severe endings such as suicide and literature tries to support the fact that the negative effects of cyberbullying are numerous. The problem is steadily becoming more severe, but schools are having a difficult way of addressing the problem. While an increases of cyberbullying is certainly evident, there is definitely a lack of sound research developed to provide schools with proactive steps that can be taken in order to combat the problem. Many of the students today were born into a culture where technology use has always been constants in their lives. Internet use and social networking occupies a great deal of time of most students as the move into

adolescence. Of course, there are many benefits associated with the Internet, but most adolescents log on to the Internet to socialize (Media Awareness Network, 2012). As time continues to progress, the quantity and popularity of social networking continues to soar, which gives more opportunities for the misuse of technology. Due to this, cyberbullying has become a phenomenon that is increasing in prevalence. While cyberbullying is in its infancy, Ybarra and Mitchell (2004) states that the negative outcomes associated with cyberbullying are similar to that of traditional bullying. According to Ybarra and Mitchell (2004), there is a strong link between cyberbullying and psychosocial maladjustment for both the bully and the victim.

Not all victims that are experiencing cyberbullying are reporting the incidents. According to many findings from Hinduja and Patchin, 34% of victims have felt frustration, over 30% felt angry, and about 22% felt sadness. Although many of those behaviors do not initially occur at school, their emotional effects often accompany the students when they come to school. Some of those emotional effects can lead to an increase in violence, increases in truancy because of fear, and a decrease of academic success (Beran & Li, 2005). School leaders and educators have to invest more interest in dealing with the issues that are related to cyberbullying.

SECTION FOUR

Policy Argument

Why is cyberbullying a problem?

According to Internet World Stats (2015), approximately 87.9% of Americans have access to the Internet, a 190.4% growth since 2000. With more students having access to social networking sites and other means of electronic communication, there has been an increase of allegations of cyberbullying by middle and high school students. A study by Calvete (2010) revealed that of the 1431 adolescents who took a questionnaire about cyberbullying, 44.1 % responded that they have been exposed to at least one act of cyberbullying. According to another study that was done by Fenaughty and Harre (2013), among 1673 students, aged 12-19 years of age, 53.7% reported being cyberbullied in the prior year.

School bullying has been around for many decades, and evolved into cyberbullying. The attention of very high profile cases of teens committing suicide, social media of protest, the internet, and the increase capabilities of cell phones in the hands of teenagers, the issue of cyberbullying has shot to the forefront of the agendas in most schools communities throughout the United States. Because of its increase prevalence and subsequent negative emotional and physical effects it have become an important issue (Hinduja & Patchin, 2013). A dramatic spike in cyberbullying awareness has been seen, many educators and policymakers have yet to be able to determine the appropriate means of resolving this phenomenon that has went on the raise in thThis research is pertinent to school leaders and policymakers to be more informed on how to proactively create policies that would decrease the prevalence and negative effectiveness that

cyberbullying cause on the students that are being victims. Many educators, school leaders, and district leaders are still struggling on how to intervene when incidents of cyberbullying are being report. Feinburg and Robey (2009) states that the school leaders struggle centers on their hesitance to take action on the behaviors because most of the incidents do not take place on school grounds. Even though most incidents of cyberbullying take place off school grounds, the disruption that it brings to the school grounds causes a disruption in the schools learning environment.

The gap exists between the technological abilities of the youth of today and the previous generations. Until policies are put into place to narrow the gap, it will continue to be difficult to earn the trust of the teens of today because there is a sense of mistrust between teens and school leaders. In the words of Juvonen and Gross (2008), “until that barrier is broken down schools, students, and parents cannot work collaboratively to attack cyberbullying.” The victim does not trust school leaders enough to investigate the issue without bias and playing the blame game. Cyberbullying can undermine a school’s climate, cause a negative effect of emotional and physical well-being of many of the school students. More research is needed in order to identify strategies and policies that need to be in place for the school communities in order to prevent or reduce the many forms of cyberbullying.

The Problem

This problem now plagues students on the school grounds. High profile cases are spotlighting the issue of cyberbullying. Now school leaders and policymakers are becoming more aware of the seriousness of the issues that are consistently plaguing our school communities. The evolution has societal impact as well.

Many school leaders have no idea how to deal with the issue or conduct a proper investigation. While there is much research done on traditional bullying, very little exists specifically on cyberbullying. More education need to be done in order for policies to be more effective when it comes to the issues of cyberbullying coming over into the school community many school officials do not understand the policy and how to properly investigate the allegations that were stated. It is to their understanding that because the incident did not occur on school grounds, that it is not the responsibility of the school leaders to get involved.

Research has shown associations between bullying and the long-term effects experienced by the victims. Teenagers that have been exposed to bullying throughout school have reported problems with anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, absenteeism, and reduced school achievement (Hunt, Peters & Rapee, 2012). Gould (2007) has also identified suicidal behaviors as another strong stressor associated with bullying. Another researcher Kellam (2003) conducted research that concluded that boys that had experienced bullying during their elementary school years, were at a higher risk for being arrested as juveniles, developing conduct disorders, and antisocial personality disorders. Another study indicated that children that are bullied at about the age of eight are more likely to commit criminal offenses as an adult (Ayenibiowo & Akinbode, 2011). According to researcher Ronning (2009) frequent bullying behavior is an indicator of present and future psychopathology.

SECTION FIVE

Policy Implementation Policy

When it comes solving the issue of cyberbullying, there is no easy answer that will protect today's teens from their online experience, but there are steps that can be taken to help reduce negativity. The majority of teens do not feel that adults are capable of preventing or stopping cyberbullying from occurring. It is important that educators begin by communicating the awareness of the problem and a willingness to help if it does occur. Many schools feel that they can block all access to technology (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010). The problem of cyberbullying has become prevalent in the twenty-first century. According to Juvonen and Gross (2008), nearly 72% of teenagers have been victims of cyberbullying at some point and that it is so severe that as many as 95% of teenagers feel negative effects from the incidents of cyberbullying. Many of the effects that the victim experience include emotional and psychological disorders, low self-esteem, anxiety, being embarrassed, depression, decreased academic achievement, and potentially suicide (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010).

Social networking can affect students' behavior in their learning environment. According to the Feinberg and Robey (2008), cyberbullying events can undermine the school culture and functioning, as well as put some students at risk for mental health and safety problems. Having the ability to develop an effective cyberbullying program is a struggle for most school leaders. Another struggle that occurs is, the lack of reporting by the students who are witnessing these events occurring.

Needed educational activities

It is important to have a better understanding of cyberbullying and the effectives that it has on the learning environment. School leaders, parents, and community leaders can work more effectively to create a safer learning environment for all students. While most of these incidents occur else where it is difficult for school leaders. This is where more educational activities need to be developed in order to educate school leaders and teachers on how to properly deal with the issue, when it comes into the learning environment. School are supposed to be considered a safe place where learning takes place, but in today's society it is difficult for students to find safety in their learning environment because there is so much chaos taking place.

Cyberbullying is defined as “willingful and repeated harm that is inflicted through the use of computers, cell phones, and other electronic devices.” This definition of cyberbullying should be used in all district and school documents in order for all to understand what cyberbullying is identified as.

Bandura (1973) stated that aggression is a learned behavior called social learning theory. When he conducted an experiment with children and a Bobo doll, the children first observed a model being aggressive with the doll, and then the children mimicked the behavior that they witnessed. According to Bandura (1977), people learn through observing others behavior, be it positive or negative. School leaders and educators need to be able to understand that this behavior that students are exemplifying is something that was taught. Olweus (1993) agreed with the relationship of social learning theory and cyberbullying, because bullies main objective is to gain dominance over their victims.

Staff development plan

School leaders as well as educators must understand that bullying is a form of internal and external factors that can contribute to mental, emotional, and physical changes within the individual. Other motives that contribute to this behavior of bullying are family background characteristics contributed to be modeled and reinforced by the aggressors' family role model. Learning experience is pivotally important in shaping peoples overall behavior and attitudes. School leaders and educators should be required to take a training about what researchers say about cyberbullying and the effects that it has on the educational environment. They have to understand that people behavior is directly related to and dictated by learning and social experiences attained by individuals. According to Solomon (2004), social learning theory is based on the principle that humans possess the ability to learn and to modify their behavior through observation. Social learning theory is divided into four prime stages: attention, retention, production, and motivation. Which is important for educators because they can engage the students into positive or negative behaviors. When educators understand the Social Learning Theory it allows them to better understand the consequences of cyberbullying for students who are victims. Educators need to be made aware that bullies often belong to popular groups, which not only gives them clout to get their way among students, but it also gives them power over other because others often aspire to the bullies positions (Thunfors & Cornell, 2008). Bullies often can often influence their victims into becoming bullies or being violent later on in their lives (Bender & Losel, 2011). The social learning theory provides a comprehensive insight and explanation through drawing on relevant models.

Educators need to understand Bandura's psychological theories of human development, in order to help tactic cyberbullying. They have to be aware that children learn to become violent when they are exposed to this type of behavior at an early age in life. Environment plays a part in the reaction of students. For example, when a child is exposed to violence at home, the child tends to display that type violent behavior. With Bandura's theory as a framework for staff development, it will help educators and school leaders understand how students in their school or class become bullies.

School leaders and educators have to understand that the issue of cyberbullying is a whole-school community issue. There is no single solution to preventing cyberbullying from happening, but there needs to be strategies in place to help develop an effective comprehensive prevention plan. There are five key areas that all schools need to address.

1. **Understanding and talking about cyberbullying-** The whole school community needs a shared agreement of what cyberbullying consist of? All school leaders and educators need to be aware of the impact of cyberbullying and the ways that it impacts the victims. The students and their parents should be aware of what the sanctions are if this occurs on the school property or causes a disruption to the learning environment. It should also be made aware to the parents and students that the school can provide them with some type of support if the incident of cyberbullying takes places outside of school.
2. **Updating existing policies and practices-** Review and update the school anti-bully policy, for example, (Acceptable Use Policies), the rules that the students have to agree to in order to use technology in the school. School leaders and educators must keep good records of any incidents of

cyberbullying. Be able to conduct searches of internet use records at school.

This may act as an effective consequence for bullies.

3. **Making reporting cyberbullying easier**-Provide a different way of reporting cyberbullying in schools, for example a student council taskforce can be formed, peer reporting, and anonymous reporting. No one should feel that they have to deal with cyberbullying alone, and reporting any incident of cyberbullying should be accessible.
4. **Promoting the positive use of technology**- Explore safe ways of using technology with students, in order to support positive self-esteem, assertiveness, and to develop positive friendships. Discuss e-safety and global literacy and show students that educators understand the technologies that they use.
5. **Evaluating the impact of prevention activities**- Regular reviews are essential to make sure that anti-bullying policies are working properly and are up-to-date. Conduct an annual survey of students' experiences of cyberbullying, and include a parent satisfaction survey. Getting data on how students and parents view the policies are important because it allows the school leader to see the pros and cons of the policy. While keeping it a flexible document

The whole school community has an important part to play in ensuring cyber safety. It is important to understand teen's online lives and activities to respond to situations appropriately and effectively. School leaders, educators, and parents need to

understand the technology lingo that teens are using because it will give them a better understanding of what they are saying.

Time schedules

In the beginning of the school year, school leaders must address a code of conduct rule. This code of conduct includes rules, procedures, and expectations made to staff, students, and parents in various manners. It is important that school leaders understand that they have a legal responsibility in regards to educating students and staff on the policies for bullying. Homeroom teachers should go through the code of conduct and policies with their students. Educators have an obligation to be proactive in their approach in going over the code of conduct and policies. They must hold class meetings in the beginning and end of the day, using informational videos where students are the actors. In order for school leaders and educators need to gain a positive rapport, they will have to understand the culture core values and norms that are represented in the school environment. School leader and educators need to have individual interviews with the students that are considered to be targets of cyberbullying, these group of individuals need to realize, that they can trust the adults that are within the school building.

During the first few weeks of school, the school leader needs to build a circle of trust, starting with the school staff. At this time a survey should be taken by the staff, in order for the school leader to gain understanding, and verify the staff's knowledge of cyberbullying. By gaining this knowledge from the survey, the school leader will know what professional needs are required, in order to train the staff about the awareness and how to prevent it.

Monthly Meeting and Partnership

According to many researchers, such as Hinduja and Patchin (2010), school leaders who enforce, listen, interact, and connect with parents, their staff, the student body, and the community are able to set the tone for the building. The actions of the school leader, is the one that can establish trust or distrust when it comes to situations especially cyberbullying investigations. Whether or not the school leader enforces consequences for breaking school and district policies, trust in the leadership is an important priority. Being able to establish meaningful relationships strengthens the culture of the building, while creating a positive school culture that is necessary among all stakeholders.

The establishment of a positive rapport with open communication, with parents and community about the issues of cyberbullying creates a win-win situation for all parties involved in the educational environment. Since technology will continue to advance, educational institutions need help from the community and the parents in order to protect the students. The community of stakeholders should use the issue of cyberbullying as an opportunity to teach students and their parents about the use of technology properly. Parents and community partners the parameters of what the local school and district can and cannot do. It is important that they are aware there is a lot that happens on the outside of the school that the educational institution cannot control. When cases of cyberbullying incidents are alleged parents should be invited in for the investigation process and allowed to review the cyberbullying messages. Parents need to be a part of the investigation process and have the chance to give any information on the investigation that might be helpful in coming to a resolution.

It is important that parents and community partners understand how cyberbullying is considered punishable when it causes a disruption within the learning environment. The district does not have a clearly stated policy. In the students code of conduct it states:

Refrain from making threats of violence, joking about violence or starting rumors of violence against the school, staff, or students. Such actions will be quickly and thoroughly investigated. Violations of the Code of School/ Classroom Conduct that are dangerous, disruptive or interfere with a teacher's ability to teach effectively **will not be tolerated**. (Milwaukee Public Schools Student Code of Conduct, 2015 p. 19).

There are 14 offenses mentioned under disruption of school, the last of which is bullying.

Community partners and parents have to understand that the Internet has changed the course of education and has impacted society in a yin yang type of way, meaning that with every positive there is a negative. Cyberbullying starts outside of the learning environment and leaks into the learning environment, and then it becomes a serious issue because of the disruption that it causes. Most of the time, school leaders do not treat things different unless they get the heads up from parents that something is going on. At that point school leaders notify the students that are involved that they are aware of the problem, but the school leader does not notify the educator that is in contact with all parties involved. This is problematic because if the educator has these students in class, the incident would continue to grow and other students, possible will get involved. All

stakeholders have to realize that, even though the issue started on the outside, that once it causes a disruption to the learning environment, it is now considered a school issue.

School leaders have several roles to play within the educational field they must be very knowledgeable and have to build relationships with parents, teachers, and educators, as well as have the ability to communicate expectations, be able to make difficult decisions, and have the ability to deal with discipline problems that involve students and parents. They have to be able to educate all stakeholders about the issues of cyberbullying. It is the school leaders' job to protect the students that they are servicing and their safety should be a top priority. Being reactive but being proactive and teaching prevention and safety is the key to helping prevent this from occurring in the school setting.

SECTION SIX

Policy Assessment Plan

School leaders play a pivotal in developing and implementing cyberbullying policies and in context, of other whole school and community efforts in order to promote a positive school climate. One role that school leaders have is teaching students how to be civil to one another, as well as promoting understanding and respect for diversity and difference. It is the responsibility of school leaders to stay up-to-date with current

research and ways of preventing incidents of cyberbullying from occurring in their school buildings. Which should be required in a professional development for all staff, which includes the school leader. Also, it is the school leader's responsibility to partner with other schools and community partners to develop and implement a plan to prevent cyberbullying from occurring.

The study of this policy will help to inform school leaders, educators, parents, and community partners about the disruption that cyberbullying causes in the learning environment and the importance to promote prevention activities. This study will help keep students safer because all stakeholders may recognize that most of the cyberbullying occurs at home or the community, but leaks into the learning environment, causing disruption. School leaders may benefit from being more aware of updated techniques in order to prevent cyberbullying of their student body. School districts and schools may mandate training for all their school leaders because cyberbullying has become the contemporary form of bullying and harassment. The goal for the training would be the indicators and the interventions so that the consequences shared with the students and their parents are consistent and effective. The training for the school leaders should be focused on procedures, investigations, consequences, and the follow-up for the involved parties of the cyberbullying incident and the victims. The training will be also keep educators aware of the signs, trends, and reporting procedural expectations of cyberbullying.

When schools have a relationship with the parents of the students that they are servicing, the implementation of parental agreements are easier learning environment could provide counseling or intervention to the bullies and their victims that would focus

on age appropriate behaviors and self-esteem issues. Educators could be of great help by being cognizant of the issues surrounding cyberbullying by sharing responsibility to help their students and make parents aware of any issues. It is important to create awareness of online activities, the dangers of no supervision. Victimization is real and it is not going away without interventions from educational institutions, community partners, and families. All schools throughout the school district should provide community and parent involvement nights throughout the school year, where they would share information on cyberbullying, the effects and preventions; as well as build relationships with community partners where they could discuss ways of how to fund a program to prevent cyberbullying. Building relationships among school leaders, educators, students, parents, and community partners are necessary in order to build a safe and positive school culture.

1. **Understanding and talking about cyberbullying** The schools need to create a forum, which should involve a school leader, at least parents from every grade level, educators from every grade level, two students from every grade level, and one community leader. This think tank would address the school community about considerations, data, and preventions that can be put into place to help decrease the issues of cyberbullying and the like.

- The school leader should create a survey to pass out to the team that will be a part of the forum.
- The survey will address the issues of cyberbullying. This survey is to make sure that everyone that is a part of the forum understands the indicators and effects of cyberbullying behavior.

- The school leader will analyze the survey, in order to make sure that the team is solid or if they need more training on understanding cyberbullying.
 - Discuss the findings with the team and develop an online survey for educators to take during the first days of school.
 - A professional development should be done during the first couple days of schools, in order to make sure that all staff is on the same page of understanding and being able to discuss cyberbullying within the classrooms.
2. **Updating existing policies and practices-** It is important that the school leader, school governance, and educator leader should do an annual audit on existing policies and procedures to decide what needs to be changed in order to include updated information about cyberbullying prevention and how to respond to the incidents.
- The team should review the current district and school policy on cyberbullying.
 - Review what the law states about cyberbullying and develop an effective policy.
 - Update the policy and make sure it's in welcome packages for students and parents to sign.
 - Make sure that the policy is also on the school web page and posted throughout the school building.

- Educators are expected to review the policy and make sure that their students understand, what cyberbullying is the effects, the consequences, and how to prevent it from happening.
 - Parents and students must sign the updated policy, to state that they understand.
3. **Making reporting cyberbullying easier-** Schools should be required to setup a cyberbullying taskforce that should be made up of a student from each grade level and a teacher advisor that most students in the school community can trust. This would help to identify what the problems are and help to develop a solution in conjunction with the teacher advisor.
- Create a web based form for students to report incidents of cyberbullying anonymously.
 - It is the school leader's responsibility to investigate the alleged incidents that are reported without bias.
 - The incidents will be documented, in order to review at a later date.
 - Collecting all necessary data will help to assess the outcome.
4. **Promoting the positive use of technology-** It is important to keep updated with the newest technologies that are being developed. This will help to prevent students from potential abuse and risk that may put them in danger. While young people are experts on their own about the use of technology, they may not necessarily understand all the risk involved and why it is important for them to understand how to protect their selves.

- Parent and student meetings in order to teach both students and their parents about positive use of technology.
- Both student and parent will sign the technology form stating that they understand the use of technology.
- Parents will have students' portal information and be able to check all necessary information access.
- Educators will continue to teach students about the importance of using technology positively. This should be done within the first 30 minutes of every day.
- This activity can be as a circle time activity (restorative justice).

5. **Evaluating the impact of prevention activities-** When tackling cyberbullying it is an ongoing process, and to get the most out of the prevention policy, it is vital to review all activities that is going on. Cyberbullying should be included in review processes and be included wherever appropriate in any new policies.

- Provide resources to help students and parents identify the consequences of cyberbullying.
- Monthly parent trainings for parents whom child has been accused of cyberbullying.
- Support for students whom have been victims of cyberbullying.

In order to assess and have an effective cyberbullying policy it is recommended that school leaders focus on communication when developing these policies. It is important to educate and enforce rules consistently during morning announcements may reduce cyberbullying incidents. School leaders and educational staff must document

cyberbullying incidents and notify students and parents of the situation that is occurring and what the consequences will be. School leaders and their team should establish weekly character campaigns of respect and responsibility and have a student announcer announce different character developments for the week. It is important that the character campaigns be posted around the school for all students, parents, and community partners to observe. A creation of student videos with students from the school showing appropriate online behavior should be established. School leaders should make sure to communicate with all parents of the students that would be involved in the video publications. Monthly parent informational meetings on cyberbullying and online computer usage should be offered. School leaders should keep cyberbullying on their monthly agenda for their district school meetings. Schools should have established collaboration time for the school team to meet to determine the disruption of the cyberbullying incidents within the school. Lastly, established professional development including educator training and school leader programs that focus on workshops and parent meeting to educate on the use of technology.

In order for it to be more effective several more procedures could be developed from the policy. The school leaders should create a behavior support for bullies and the victims to build their self-esteem. By creating this support group, it will allow all parties get the necessary help that they will need, in order to resolve the issues. A program should be created of peer mentors who would work with students to resolve conflicts that are caused by cyberbullying. Students seem to learn better from their peers; especially, students that are considered to be positive leaders. A link on the school website should

be created to report cyberbullying incidents that emerge and offer a tip line to report incidents of cyberbullying.

SECTION SEVEN

Summary Impact Statement

This policy addresses problems of cyberbullying that is taking place in the middle schools and the need for students to be educated. The design and implementation of the cyberbullying prevention program needs to be implemented, in middle and high school in order to address the need for parent education and students about cyberbullying anew methods to deter it. There needs to be a unified front between school, community, and home to combat the issue of cyberbullying. The mission is to provide middle schools with a program that can assist with the needs of the parents, schools, and community.

Being able to develop an effective cyberbullying program is definitely a struggle for most school leaders since many of the behaviors occur off of school grounds and not during school hours. An additional struggle is the fact that many students who witness incidents of cyberbullying, refuse to report it. According to Hinduja and Patchin (2008), research shows that somewhere between 10-15 % of students who are considered victims of cyberbullying actually report their incidents to an adult at the school. However, because many of these incidents of cyberbullying, occurs off school grounds, are resolved many times at school, with makes the issue extremely relevant to the school and the school leader.

Many schools want to relate cyberbullying as a new issue that has arrived, but it is a phenomenon that has evolved and is embedded in traditional bullying. There have been many examples of the devastating effects of cyberbullying left uninvestigated and has inflicted thousands of victims. Stories of Ryan Patrick Halligan (ABC News, 2003) are becoming more and more common as time progresses whether major or minor the effects cyberbullying are extremely powerful, many children believe the only way that they can cope, is to take their own lives. Instead of school leaders and educators doing business as usual, quality school leaders and educators should be worried about the student as a whole. This means that if students are being affected by incidents of cyberbullying, it is their problem to help prevent and address it.

The education of students are very important in the twenty-first century, but education comes in many different forms. There is a pivotal need to teach students about the effects of cyberbullying and how to respond to cyberbullying incidents, but it takes a school leader and educators, that do not have a problem developing a better quality policy, to address the concerns of cyberbullying. Students need to be more aware of the policies concerning cyberbullying, as well as their parents. There should be no more business as usual when children are feeling that their only way out, is to bring harm to themselves. It is the job of school leaders to take proactive measures when addressing this concern.

Students have the right to go to school with the confidences that they are safe. Bullying has always been done in schools throughout the ages, but cyberbullying adds another dimension to the torture that perpetrators can inflict in advancing technology. The job of school leaders, educators, and all other stakeholders are very complex in

today's society. Educators cannot just teach the curriculum that is set for them to teach. Now they have to worry about accountability and test scores. They are expected to provide quality education to all students, are given solutions to dealing with students who are bullied online.

School leaders have a difficult job in today's society, human dynamics is a complex science. They are required to move the school forward, but are challenged with students who do not feel secure and safe. Chaos arise during non-school hours and days. The chaos causes a great disruption in the learning environment, which adds an additional burden to their job.

What Happens Next?

Approximately 93% of cyberbullying victims have felt negative effects, when experiencing issues of being cyberbullied, which includes thoughts of suicide (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008). According to Ybarra and Mitchell (2004), most school leaders are looking at making Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) instead of looking at the conditions that are happening emotionally with their student body, such as an increase of substance abuse and the students' unfavorable attitude towards attending school. These facts should be enough to convince school leaders that they must take a proactive approach to handling the issue of cyberbullying seriously. It is reported by Ybarra (2007) that students that have experienced cyberbullying are likely to carry a weapon to school within the first 30 days of their experience.

If every child that enters the school building feels safe and secure, then every educator has the obligation to take action to keep those students safe and secure. With the takeover of social networking in the past few years, cyberbullying is now an issue that

educator just simply ignore it must be acknowledged as a primary concern when evaluating threats of harm. Policies are made to be followed, but planning and evaluating are equally important. Being proactive when it comes to this issue is pertinent and children are not feeling safe because of this issue.

It is important to understand that technology is changing at a rapid speed and it is very difficult to keep up with the changing times. A school leader who has an excellent cyberbullying policy in effect, but fails to consistently evaluate the policy for effectiveness will most likely have an outdated and ineffective policy that does not work for this current time period. An evaluation of effective cyberbullying policies cannot be summative. It needs to continue to be an ongoing practice in order to remain relevant of the current times.

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SECTION ONE

Vision Statement

Personal Understanding of Cyberbullying

I remember the first time that I heard about cyberbullying. One of my daughters was in middle school and the other two were in elementary. When I picked them up from

school they were talking about a young boy by the name of Ryan Patrick Halligan that had killed himself because he was being bullied. At first, I thought that this young boy attended their school, but I was wrong. The case of what happened to this teenager was all over the news both locally and internationally. I was completely saddened and upset this happened to this teenager. Additionally, the circumstances had made my daughters completely distraught.

When my youngest daughter started high school, she experienced being bullied via the computer. She had a MySpace page and there were several young ladies that would threaten her daily. I did not understand, but I was an active parent and it was my job to protect my daughter. I remember how she wanted to attend another high school because of this issue. Well, I refused to allow those young ladies to win. I went to the school and complained about what was happening to her. It was a battle because the young ladies were refusing to admit what they were doing to her. It was a back and forth battle and I was getting frustrated and my daughter was getting tired of the constant harassment. Finally, I got proof that of what they were doing to my daughter.

My eldest and middle daughter came to me and showed me my youngest daughter's MySpace page. I was livid and frustrated about what these young ladies had said. I had to think about what I was going to do. I talked to my daughters about the post, I thought fast and copied and pasted everything that they said, before they could erase it. I wanted to post a comment so bad that I had to walk away from the computer screen. Well, the following day I was at the school and talking to one of the school administrators Mrs. Gonzalez-Edwards. All the young ladies that were involved in cyberbullying incident were suspended from school and a parent conference was setup. In

the end, everything worked out and it became a thing of the past, but every issue of cyberbullying does not have a happy ending.

World News Event of Cyberbullying

Ryan Patrick Halligan could be described as a typical 13 year-old trying to make his way through his troubling adolescent years. Ryan frequently encountered, on/off, bullying situations since he was in the fifth grade. Other than one fistfight that Ryan had encountered, his parents tried to help him through those difficult times. They believed that the problems he had been experiencing were normal and under control. Like most children his age, Ryan loved being online. During the summer of 2003, he had been spending a great deal of time alone in his room instant messaging online. Unbeknownst to his parents and to himself, Ryan did not know that he had befriended one of the students who had previously bullied him. While developing this friendship, Ryan invested a lot of trust in his new friend. He made the mistake of sharing personal information regarding things that he experienced and could potentially be somewhat embarrassing if exposed to the public. The student whom Ryan shared this embarrassing information with, betrayed his trust and began to spread rumors, online and offline, insinuating Ryan was gay. Due to this espousing of information, Ryan had to endure teasing and taunting from many of his peers.

Regardless of Ryan's experience, his desire to gain friendship impeded his judgment. Later on, Ryan befriended a girl from the same school online with hopes of helping with the rumors; but she was not his friend either. Publicly she called Ryan a loser and told her friends that she was only joking with him online. Her friendship with Ryan online was a deceitful endeavor of getting him to share some personal and

embarrassing things. She had succeeded. The same girl shared this information with many of her classmates. As a result, cyberbullying got so intense that Ryan started exhibiting his suicide plans with others online.

On October 7, 2003, while Ryan's father was away on business and everybody in the house was asleep. Perhaps building up to this climax more he hung himself in the family's bathroom. Following his death, his father was able to use a computer program to obtain the transcripts of some of the online conversations. In addition to the consistent online bullying, there were conversations with other students in which suicide was encouraged. Even though Ryan came from a loving and supportive family, his online social life disrupted his stability.

Today the internet has become a principle part of our daily lives. Many would say that they could not live without it. According to Lenhart (2001), millions of youth between the ages of twelve and seventeen use the Internet on a daily basis. It is estimated that 97% of today's youth are connected in some way with some device to the Internet (Ybarra, 2004). Social networking and online communication have become major conduits in the life of today's teenagers', impacting all of their social interactions (Lenhart, 2001). Today, teenagers primarily use the internet as a tool to enhance their social status by being able to maintain their friendships and having the ability to build new relationships (Gross, 2004). According to Bargh, McKenna and Fitzsimons (2002) the Internet has become a common tool utilized by school-aged students, because it is believed to be a stress-free way to make friends.

The internet provides a platform enabling people to hide behind the vial of secrecy to school-aged children may be a useful social crutch for those that are not

sociable in person. It also has the ability to open up doors for the misuse of technology as children can say and do anything that they would normally not do in person. This can prove harmful in many instances because this method of interaction can embolden some children to experiment in aggressive behaviors. For example, children can start to carry weapons, such as knives and guns, they can start to become very explosive over minor incidents and begin to become physical. Ybarra and Mitchell (2004) states plainly, that despite the many wondrous beauties of the internet, it is considered the new form of bullying, cyberbullying. Cyberbullying is considered a large problem in many educational institutions today, because now students have access to Facebook, Instagram, and twitter, where they can hide their identity.

Cyberbullying is still a relatively new phenomenon, but the data in existence indicates that the negative effects of cyberbullying are at similar to those of more traditional forms of bullying (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004). It is important to take a look at the effects of traditional bullying in order to gain insight of cyberbullying. Traditional bullying is an imbalance of power. Traditional bullying is a means of gaining and sustaining power and demonstrates what occurs when one person imposes their power on their victim. Even with the infancy of cyberbullying, traditional bullying has been a deeply embedded problem in schools throughout the world (Roland, 2001).

According to Cartwright (1995), bullying used to be looked upon as something that was irrelevant, as victimization helped to toughen up children. Olweus (2015) described a bullying victim as someone who is subjected to aggressive actions from someone and who is more dominant than they are than someone who is bullied when one or more students repeatedly expose them to negative actions. Bullying research has

continued to grow over the years, it has become evident that the negative effects of bullying can range anywhere from relatively minor to extremely severe. The list of physical and emotional effects of bullying includes headaches, but are not limited to stomachaches, tiredness, depression, anxiety, delinquency, truancy, social isolation, sleep disorders, and possibly even suicide (Cullerton, & Crick, 2005). Although, the prevalence of bullying decreases as people grow older, victims who have not properly addressed their problems that have manifested due to bullying have a higher level of academic failure (Leff, 1999). These emotional and physical effects do not always remain in adolescence; they can often carry over until their adulthood (Batsche and Knoff, 1994).

Unfortunately, according to Hinduja (2009) few children ever report that they are being bullied. School officials are often unaware of the prevalence of bullying in their own institution (Cornell, 2004). Many children in middle school often fail to report bullying behaviors because they believe it will not be solved and that they would be blamed for the incident. This may be attributed to the perception of many children who believe bullying behaviors are often tolerated or ignored by school officials, or that teachers rarely detect or intervene in the incidents (Skiba & Fontanini, 2001) even if the bullying takes place in the classroom. There is a clear disconnect between students, teachers, and administrators, which only express the urgency for attention and action on the topic. The need to address bullying, is de-emphasized students feel less safe and satisfied in schools in which have high incidents of bullying reported (Olweus, 2015).

As technology has become fully integrated into the lives of children, the negative effects of life online are becoming more clearly identified. There is an excessive amount

of time spent online and can lead to increased loneliness and depression (Nie & Ebring, 2000). The more time spent in cyberspace, the more likely that children are to lose sight with their social environment (Nie & Ebring, 2002). These emotional changes can lead to online victimization, now referred to as cyberbullying, which became widespread around 2004 (Phillips, 2004). Cyberbullying was defined by Beasley (2004) as the “use of information and communication technologies such as emails, cell phone, text messages, and instant messaging, in which hostile behavior by an individual or group, is intended to bring about harm to others.”

Even though researchers have not yet fully examined the nature of cyberbullying (Beran, 2005), its anonymous nature can often lead to interchangeable roles, in which individuals can be considered a bully or victim (Ybarra, 2004). These acts of cyberbullying usually take place away from school, they are a growing problem for many schools throughout the nation, because actions that had taken place online previously often play out in person the next day at the school (Lacey, 2007). Alarming statistics indicate that incidents of cyberbullying are becoming quite more common.

According to Strom (2005), cyberbullying can be more devastating than the traditional form of bullying due to the much larger audience online and because a child's home is no longer their safe haven (McClung, 2006). Furthermore, the anonymity of the internet allows a bully to be more abusive online than they would be in person. Even though information is starting to become more readily available regarding the prevalence of cyberbullying, there is still limited research indicating the best way to deal with the issue.

One of the reasons the issue of cyberbullying started to receive so much attention is because the news is starting to report more cases of teenage suicide as a result of incessant cyberbullying. While incidents of suicide due to cyberbullying are considered rare, reported and well-documented cases make it evident that there is a dire need for action. There needs to be an increased awareness on the topic and policies need to be in place on the educational level, to ensure that stories such as those of Ryan Patrick Halligan are not repeated in the near future (ABC News, 2010).

According to the policy that Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) has in place concerning the matter of bullying, it gives a clear definition of what bullying is considered and the different levels that is associated with the definition. However, there are still students in the district that are being treated the same way as Ryan Patrick Halligan. He was one normal teenager that had dreams and goals, but because there were not appropriate measures taken, the effects of bullying were detrimental and contributed to his death. Unfortunately, stories similar to those of Ryan Patrick Halligan are becoming more common for teens. Even though not all cases of cyberbullying end as suicide, the literature supports that negative effects of cyberbullying are numerous. The problem is steadily becoming more severe, and schools need to find ways to address the problem in order to help their students.

This type of issue interrupts education on a daily basis. More and more students within MPS are exhibiting this type of behavior of becoming victims of cyberbullying on social media. The fear is that they could be lost in the system, if there is not a change in the policy when it comes to addressing the one/s that are causing the harm. There is great deal of disconnect when it comes to school level administrators dealing with the issues of

cyberbullying. Many administrators will state to the students that they cannot deal with community issues. There needs to be a better policy in place in order for MPS to be a part of the solution and not continue to be a part of the problem. In order for this to happen, there needs to be a more effective policy in place that all respective schools, within the district, can execute to bring about a more positive change in the school environment. A tougher policy needs to be in place in order to decrease the incidents of cyberbullying. For example, Messmer Catholic Schools policies have a nonnegotiable policy when it comes to harassment, bullying, and cyberbullying. Students that are involved in that type of behavior, whether it takes place inside the school environment or on the outside, are grounds for expulsion (Messmer, 2015).

SECTION TWO

Analysis of Need

Introduction

Throughout the recent decade, cyberbullying has become an important issue in the educational world, especially among middle and high school students. There are many different behaviors that are associated with this type of behavior. The issue of cyberbullying is difficult to understand because this is a recent phenomenon. It has become a hot topic for many communities, parents, educational institutions, and lawmakers, but most of the data that has been collected on this issue is considered an underdeveloped picture of the prevalence of the problem (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009). Cyberbullying has become alarming because the perpetrators are able to permeate into an area where the victims of their torment have no way to escape the harassment. There have been many debates over who has jurisdiction in dealing with the issues of cyberbullying because most have no jurisdiction online. There is a persistent belief that schools are obligated to address the issues that are associated with harassment, since it is considered to affect the educational environment (Feinberg & Robey, 2009). In fact, according to Hinduja and Patchin (2010) studies show that when school children are involved in cyberbullying incidents, they perceive a poorer climate at their schools than those children who have not been victimized by cyberbullying.

Additionally, to Hinduja and Patchin (2010), it is extremely important to understand that most cyberbullies are individuals that have had a personal relationship with their victims. In fact, a recent study completed by the Children's Home and Society of America, showed that 80 % of cyberbullying victims knew their harasser; whereas,

approximately 20% of the victims did not know the identity of the harasser. Many researchers have stated that many victims of cyberbullying are also likely to use social media to bully others (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010). Statistics support that many school children that have been a victim of cyberbullying, have also been victims to traditional bullying (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010). These students become isolated, misunderstood, and depressed when it comes to their school environment. They feel as though they have no support or guidance from school teachers and administrators (Wells & Mitchell, 2008). These victims would feel sad and depressed about their situation and were prone to hurt themselves. They were more likely to bring weapons to school for protection or retaliation (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010). According to Juvonen & Gross (2008), most cyberbullying victims that reported retaliation reportedly retaliated at school and not cyber space.

For instances, Hinduja and Patchin (2010) and many other researchers indicated that the majority of cyberbullying cases occur with older students, starting with middle school aged children with very little cyberbullying being reported in elementary school. When analyzing the gender influences on cyberbullying, it has become inconclusive. Many researchers have reported that girls are more subjective to be involved in cyberbullying incidents. Regardless of the susceptible demographics, cyberbullying cases have increased throughout the past 10 years. Many issues of cyberbullying continue to be unknown and many studies relate to the prevalence of the problem. While the percentages vary, it is clear that cyberbullying is an extraordinarily prevailing factor in the social lives of today's youth. In a study by Hinduja and Patchin (2010) of over

2000 teens, 20% reported being victims of online bullying, about 11% reported bullying others online, and 28% have reported witnessing cyberbullying.

Educational Analysis

Many school officials are starting to become more familiar with the term of cyberbullying and its effects, but many are still challenged with how they should respond when incidents of cyberbullying are reported to them. Even though suspension, expulsion, or police contact may happen, school officials are obligated to respond with the necessary discretion. When school officials take the report serious, it may alleviate stress that the student may develop from the incident (Hindujua & Patchin, 2010). Many school procedures, ask for the students to turn their cell phones off, but it's not practical or realistic that they will do that, so schools need to implement a written policy that systematically outlines a consistent approach to dealing with these types of problems. For example, there is an announcement daily via the PA system that all students are required to turn off their cellular devices. If they are caught on their cellular devices they will be taken, but the school has no written policy to effectively substantiate this procedure.

When school officials are aware of a case that is dealing with cyberbullying, schools should make sure that the victim is safe (Hinduja & Patchin 2010). School officials should gather as much information as possible regarding the case. They must make sure that they involve all parents and if necessary, law enforcement. The school should make sure that they contact their central office supervisors if they are considering a long-term removal from the school or district. As the issue of cyberbullying becomes relevant and its influence surfaces; administrative implementation of action are

mandatory. Many researchers such as Campbell (2005), stress that in order to improve the likelihood that students will report incidents of cyberbullying, school officials should take all incidents seriously and work diligently with all parents and students to adequately resolve the problem.

As the issue of cyberbullying has gained much attention through the media, many school districts have responded by adding a policy in their school policies. Since schools cannot simply ban students from having cell phones or any other electronic devices with access to the internet it is difficult to enforce the policy. The district has a responsibility to protect themselves from liability by making sure that they have a comprehensive policy that clearly defines, prohibits, and outlines the consequences for cyberbullying and other forms of electronic harassments (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010). Many people and school officials state that schools and districts cannot monitor cyberbullying behavior because it takes place off of the school grounds. This is the reason that it is important that policies must be in place to educate students with the consequences of online harassment and how it carries over to the schools the next day (Brown et al, 2006). Schools that are proactive on their approach to cyberbullying and whose policies include providing education, counseling, and a social outlet, are going to be much more successful in reducing the prevalence of cyberbullying and the subsequent effects that it brings on the victim (Hinduja & Patchin 2010).

Researchers Juvonen and Gross (2008) stated that in order to gain the trust of the students that schools are servicing, school policies must strictly state and enforce intolerance of any form of harassment or intimidation. The climate of the school can have great impact on the effectiveness of the schools being proactive. Schools have to

provide an empathetic and understanding environment where students feel comfortable talking to adults about any situations that may arrive through the course of the school year (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010). There is a generational gap that exists due to the lack of technology understanding and many students are not comfortable talking with adults when it comes to incidents such as cyberbullying. According to Juvonen and Gross (2008), until the gap narrows, students are going to remain hesitant to talk about the incident openly with authority figures. Where it has been openly communicated to students that school officials will take their concerns serious, students report that they are more likely to go to a school official that they trust to handle the situation without bringing blame to the victim.

Many of the problems that schools and school districts have with establishing policies is that they ban cyberbullying and outline the punishment for engaging in that type of behavior. Yet Shariff (2004) states that this is a necessary component of any policy, but engaging in military style zero tolerance can be ineffective and potentially counterproductive. Hinduja and Patchin (2010) believe that it is currently unclear whether or not these threats of punitive sanctions have any effect at all on the victimizer. However, it is clear that all schools and districts have to have some form of a written policy in place if they intend in implementing any consequences for cyberbullying. Many schools that have not kept their behavioral policies up to date have struggled to implement long-term behavioral consequences when an incident of cyberbullying occurs (Boucek, 2009).

Researcher Ford (2009), feels that there is no perfectly clear solution to stopping cyberbullying and that passing responsibility on the issue is not an effective approach to

preventing cyberbullying from occurring. There are not any cyberbullying programs current in place that have been fully studied for effectiveness, but there has been many programs created in order to combat traditional bullying that have been found to work (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010). Although the research on those programs have been found to be successful, many researchers (Ford, 2009) feel that methods that were used to stop traditional bullying, could also be effective to combat cyberbullying.

Even though the effectiveness of cyberbullying prevention programs are unknown, there are many steps that school officials should be taking to ensure that their cyberbullying policies address the needs of all their students and not just the students that are victims of the incident. All school administrators need to ensure that all school rules include specific language about cyberbullying and the consequences that are associated with any bullying offenses. They should work diligently with teachers, parents, and students in order to raise awareness of the problem (Brunner & Lewis, 2009). Hinduja and Patchin (2010) believe that effective school policies should; specifically define all possible means of harassment, that the punishments should increase dramatically, education should be provided to all the aggressors, policies should include specific language that addresses off-school site incidents, a reporting procedure should be established, and an outline of how reports should be investigated should be established. It is important that the policies that are put into place, should stress values, kindness, and restorative justice in order to prevent cyberbullying from occurring (Campbell, 2009). Campbell also believes that districts or states should adopt a universal policy, schools should develop and implement one within their district parameter that meets the needs of their own school population. Because parental involvement is a key factor in most facets

of education, it is recommended that cyberbullying be apart of the school Acceptable Use Policy (AUP), also that parents be required to sign the AP as well as for the students (Brown, 2006). The AUP is a document that defines the acceptable use for students to use the school network system, computer, and other technology resources. It is supposed to allow students to be able to use the internet in a safe and responsible manner.

Social Analysis

There has been an extensive amount of research done on the issue of cyberbullying, but not enough has been conducted to help understand the effects that cyberbullying has on school children mentally. Cyberbullying becomes a permanent cyberattack once it is introduced to the outside world, the victims start to experience depression and other types of mental disorders (Cassidy, Jackson, & Brown, 2009). Many researchers have concluded that, at the very least, youth who are targeted by cyberbullying seem to display negative reactions that are similar to those youth that are victims of traditional bullying (Beran & Li, 2007). It could be argued that the effects of cyberbullying are more dangerous than the traditional offensives of bullying, since the person doing the bullying cannot be seen and the victim cannot easily escape the wrath and torment of the offender (Cassidy, et al., Brown, 2009). Victimization of cyberbullying can disrupt the adolescent emotional and social development as they move on into their adult life (Raskauskas & Stoltz, 2007). According to researchers, (Patchin, 2012) 20% of children who are victims of cyberbullying, have an increased chance of experiencing suicidal thoughts and is clearly linked to them developing deviant behaviors as shoplifting, dropping out of school, drug use, and violent behaviors such as fighting.

Cyberbullying does not take place in person, the attack on the individual can take place at anytime. Electronic messaging can be distributed to a wide variety of audience in such a short amount of time, that children vulnerability is heightened. The anonymity that accompanies the distribution of the messages or pictures can be different for both the victim and perpetrator, because the aggressor cannot see the reaction of the victim and their audience. Since the aggressors cannot see a reaction from their victims or the audience, cyberbullying according to Feinburg and Robey (2009) is worse than face-to-face bullying because the perpetrators increase their intensity and frequency of their attacks without fully realizing the ramifications of their actions.

Political Analysis

The implementation of cyberbullying policies is not solely the responsibility of the school, but it is also the responsibility of the district and policymakers. District and policymakers are urged to revise the language that is in the current policies to include various forms of electronic harassment, which should include language anticipating what cyberbullying may look like (Brown, 2006). For example, since sexting (sending sexual explicit photo, images via text messages or emails) is a new and upcoming issue and a extreme phenomenon for students, policymakers would be urged to look at technological innovations that are in the works and include a clear definition and clear consequence for how this type of behavior would be dealt with (Boucek, 2009). It is important that policymakers take into account the fact that many parents do not possess the technical knowledge that their children do. According to Brown (2006) with parents not really being technically minded, policies should include parental education classes in order to educate parents on the entire new technical lingo. The effects of cyberbullying is felt by

students, parents, school staff, school district, and the public, the development of a effective policy needs to be a collaborative effort by all stakeholders.

With more issues of cyberbullying increasing at a rapid speed, more states are requiring school districts to take a proactive approach with dealing with the issue. As of July of 2013, 18 states have either proposed or passed cyberbullying laws (Hinduja & Patchin, 2013). Regardless if the mandates have come from a higher level or not, all schools and districts should have a written policy that specifically defines cyberbullying. This document should include off-school incidents, delineate punishments, and identify proactive measures to be taken in order to reduce the behavior (Hinduja & Patchin, 2013; Brown, 2006; Campbell, 2005).

Moral and Ethical Analysis

According to Juvonen and Gross (2008) many schools have a fiduciary duty to make sure that their students are safe. There is ample justification for their involvement in cases of cyberbullying that may originate away from school. Since many of the incidents are done off school grounds and are brought to school the next day, many schools could potentially face consequences for not acting in an appropriate manner when the case is reported (Smith, 2008; Brown, 2006). Administrators who fail to investigate and protect their students when their school does have a policy defining cyberbullying, which is an act that is defined as an deliberate indifference if a hostile environment is created, could be found legally liable (Trager, 2009). School leaders could also have consequences for responding inappropriately to cyberbullying aggressors (Brown, 2006). Meaning that some school leaders are bias towards other students and favor one over the other.

One of the earliest cases of bullying is in 1969 *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District*, which was a founding case which schools and districts support having jurisdiction over the behaviors of what occurred away from school. According to Trager (2009), the Tinker case of 1969, involved three schools that wore black armbands to school in protest of the Vietnam War. The school administrator decided to enforce a rule that students who wore the armbands would be suspended from school until they agreed to refrain from wearing the armbands in protest of the war. The three students continued to stand their ground and wore the armbands daily to school and in return they were issued a lengthy suspension. The incident was then taken to court and the court ultimately ruled in favor of the students. However, the impact of the case was the court determined that freedom of speech does not allow students the right to act in a manner that brings about a disruption in the school climate. The *Tinker* standard offers an appropriate tool for schools to proscribe cyberbullying policies and the disruption that it brings to the learning environment (Trager, 2009). Of course many would feel as though the *Tinker* case is not an appropriate case when considering cyberbullying, but it is important to note that the case was supported because of the disruption that it brought to the learning environment and it is not supported by the freedom of speech.

It is assumed that educators would intervene in incidents where cyberbullying interferes with the educational environment (Hinduja & Patchin, 2013). The majority of case laws support the notion that even when the disruption occurs off school grounds (Trager, 2009), but there are a small amount of incidents in which courts have not supported the actions of schools when dealing with harassment that occurred off school grounds. For example, in the case of *Klein v. Smith* in 1986, a student was suspended for

ten days because he extended his middle finger at a teacher while he was off school grounds. The student parents filed a lawsuit and prevailed because the courts determined that the student behavior did not significantly impact the learning environment.

Now the case that is more typical of cyberbullying was the case *Beussink v. Woodland School District* (1998), in this case the student was suspended from school for ten days for making posts on the web that included profanities towards the school administrator. In this case, the courts ruled that the school could not really impose discipline for an act that did not occur on school grounds. Conclusively, in the case of *Emmett v. Kent School District No 415*, the results did not end up favorably for many schools. In the case, a student was expelled from school for creating a website that included the opportunity for other students to vote on who should die next as well as mock obituaries for certain students. Even though the target audience was students from the school, the court ruled against the school with the assumption that the website was setup outside of the school.

Court rulings like *Emmett v. Kent School District* and similar are rare. Many school district personnel are reluctant to get involved in cyberbullying cases out of the fear of legal repercussions. As Hinduja & Patchin stated (2013), schools need support of the court system to embrace jurisdiction of cases that originate away from school. Luckily, most court cases in the past decade have sided in favor of the schools and districts.

The case of *Doe v. Pulanski County Special School District* (2001) is an example of a case that the courts ruled in the favor of the school. In the case the court ruled in favor of the school when they considered a threatening letter that was stolen from the

home of the writer and brought to school as an actual threat. The case of *J.S. v. Bethlehem Area School District* (2000) was about a student that created a web page that included hurtful and profane pieces of information about a certain teacher, including an inappropriate list of reasons why the teacher should be fired. The school expelled the student and the court upheld the expulsion because the web page created a disruption to the teacher and the entire school.

There are many court cases that are ruling in favor of the schools where violence can be involved and court case where school teachers are being denigrated publicly. For example, in the case of *Doninger v. Niehoff* (2007), a student created a blog that referred to the school administrator as a “douchebag” and to tell student to harass the administrator for a decision that had previously been made about a certain incident. Even though no direct threat of physical harm was made towards the administrator, the courts ruled that the student’s action caused a major disruption to the school community and thus supported the school’s disciplinary action. In the case of *Wisniewski v. Board of Education of the Weedsport Central School District* (2007), in this case a student sent some of his friends, an electronic image of his English teacher being shot in the head. For that incident the student received a suspension and the courts supported the school because the student was aware that the image would cause a considerable amount of disruption to the learning environment.

Trends in the court rulings should ease the tension of teachers and school administrators. The big debate over the issue of freedom of speech still remains ambiguous to educators and school administrators, but the courts support disciplinary actions taken by administrators?

Cyberbullying behavior among today's youth has increasing concerns among middle, and high schools. Fueled by a number of high-profiled cyberbullying incidents, there is a heightened awareness that cyberbullying represents a serious problem for youth today. Research has revealed that the issue has lasting consequences for the victim and their family; because of that issue there is a call to action for the government and school district to devise an effective solution to counterattack the behavior of cyberbullying behavior both on and off school premises.

SECTION THREE

Advocated Policy Statement

Congress passed the Protecting Children in the twenty-first century legislation, in 2008, which protects children from traditional bullying and cyberbullying (Acker & Gable, 2011). Traditional bullying consists of negative acts that caused the victim to fear the aggressor or to have feelings of distress when in the presence of the aggressor (Holladay, 2010). In the past, bullying took place on the school playground, buses, in

the school hallways, and in the school bathroom. Now, students can become a bully via electronic devices and social media with a layer of anonymity. Cyberbullying as well as traditional bullying, allows the perpetrator to gain a sense of power and social status over their victim (Holladay, 2010). Cyberbullying can be more pervasive than traditional bullying because, the perpetrator is using technological advances which means that a larger amount of people can be affected (Thomas & McGee, 2012).

The infancy of cyberbullying impede the process of developing solutions because the solutions cannot keep up with the progression of technological advances in order to correct the behavior. Cyberbullying has become viewed as an urgent social, health, and education concern that has moved to the forefront of much public debate on school legislation and policy. While many researchers are beginning to see that the school climate and mental health of the students can be seriously compromised, there seems to be a significant need for research in order to further identify viable solutions in order to help prevent and respond to digital forms of harassment (Raskauskas & Stoltz, 2007). Many school districts are beginning to implement electronic forms of harassment as apart of the policies, but merely mentioning that cyberbullying is prohibited is not a proven method in dealing with the issue. Schools are in need of researched-based programs that are devised on how to deal with cyberbullying and to make sure that the program continues to be evaluated over time for effectiveness of the program (Ybarra, 2007).

Due to advancing technological communication and the growth of social networking, cyberbullying has added a new complex dimension to the problem of bullying. Cyberbullying is commonly known as the willful and repeated harm that is inflicted through the use of computers, cell phones, and other electronic devices (Hinduja

& Patchin, 2013). There are several aspects of cyberbullying behaviors that increase its propensity to damage or harm the victims. According to Shariff (2009), physical distance between the students who bully and the targeted victims, have difficulty identifying the perpetrators, which in return lessens personal accountability and encourages more cruel and abusive behavior. The use of technology transmit content to a wide audience, also it makes acts of cyberbullying highly visible, more pervasive and more permanent. Because cyberbullying is a relatively new phenomenon and the victimization usually occurs off school grounds, it imposes challenges to schools to effectively enforce policies without overreaching their legal authority (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010).

There is a lack of empirical evidence validating the effectiveness of cyberbullying intervention programs (Mason, 2008). Many adolescents feel that their schools do not adequately address the issue of cyberbullying, there will be a need for future research, in order to identify effective school policies that are working to prevent the issue of cyberbullying. It seems that more educators are beginning to gain a better understanding surrounding the issue of cyberbullying, but there are still gaps in learning how to prevent it from occurring and understanding the many harmful effects of the incidents (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2008).

Unfortunately, many case of cyberbullying are coming more common for teenagers. Many of the cases can end up with severe endings such as suicide and literature tries to support the fact that the negative effects of cyberbullying are numerous. The problem is steadily becoming more severe, but schools are having a difficult way of addressing the problem. While an increases of cyberbullying is certainly evident, there is definitely a lack of sound research developed to provide schools with proactive steps

that can be taken in order to combat the problem. Many of the students today were born into a culture where technology use has always been constants in their lives. Internet use and social networking occupies a great deal of time of most students as the move into adolescence. Of course there are many benefits associated with the Internet, but most adolescents logon to the Internet to socialize (Media Awareness Network, 2012). As time continues to progress, the quantity and popularity of social networking continues to soar, which gives more opportunities for the misuse of technology. Due to this, cyberbullying has become a phenomenon that is increasing in prevalence. While cyberbullying is in its infancy, Ybarra and Mitchell (2004) states that the negative outcomes associated with cyberbullying are similar to that of traditional bullying. According to Ybarra and Mitchell (2004), there is a strong link between cyberbullying and psychosocial maladjustment for both the bully and the victim.

Not all victims that are experiencing cyberbullying are reporting the incidents. According to many findings from Hinduja and Patchin, 34% of victims have felt frustration, over 30% felt angry, and about 22% felt sadness. Although many of those behaviors do not initially occur at school, their emotional effects often accompany the students when they come to school. Some of those emotional effects can lead to an increase in violence, increases in truancy because of fear, and a decrease of academic success (Beran & Li, 2005). School leaders and educators have to invest more interest in dealing with the issues that are related to cyberbullying.

SECTION FOUR

Policy Argument

Why is cyberbullying a problem?

According to Internet World Stats (2015), approximately 87.9% of Americans have access to the Internet, a 190.4% growth since 2000. With more students having access to social networking sites and other means of electronic communication, there has been an increase of allegations of cyberbullying by middle and high school students. A study by Calvete (2010) revealed that of the 1431 adolescents who took a questionnaire about cyberbullying, 44.1 % responded that they have been exposed to at least one act of cyberbullying. According to another study that was done by Fenaughty and Harre (2013), among 1673 students, aged 12-19 years of age, 53.7% reported being cyberbullied in the prior year.

School bullying has been around for many decades, and evolved into cyberbullying. The attention of very high profile cases of teens committing suicide, social media of protest, the internet, and the increase capabilities of cell phones in the hands of teenagers, the issue of cyberbullying has shot to the forefront of the agendas in most schools communities throughout the United States. Because of its increase prevalence and subsequent negative emotional and physical effects it have become an important issue (Hinduja & Patchin, 2013). A dramatic spike in cyberbullying awareness has been seen, many educators and policymakers have yet to be able to determine the appropriate means of resolving this phenomenon that has went on the raise in the twenty-first century (Belsey, 2006).

This research is pertinent to school leaders and policymakers to be more informed on how to proactively create policies that would decrease the prevalence and negative effects that cyberbullying cause on the students that are being victims. Many educators, school leaders, and district leaders are still struggling on how to intervene when incidents of cyberbullying are being reported. Feinburg and Robey (2009) states that the school leaders struggle centers on their hesitance to take action on the behaviors because most of the incidents do not take place on school grounds. Even though most incidents of cyberbullying take place off school grounds, the disruption that it brings to the school grounds causes a disruption in the schools learning environment.

The gap exists between the technological abilities of the youth of today and the previous generations. Until policies are put into place to narrow the gap, it will continue to be difficult to earn the trust of the teens of today because there is a sense of mistrust between teens and school leaders. In the words of Juvonen and Gross (2008), “until that barrier is broken down schools, students, and parents cannot work collaboratively to attack cyberbullying.” The victim does not trust school leaders enough to investigate the issue without bias and playing the blame game. Cyberbullying can undermine a school’s climate, cause a negative effect of emotional and physical well-being of many of the school students. More research is needed in order to identify strategies and policies that need to be in place for the school communities in order to prevent or reduce the many forms of cyberbullying.

The Problem

This problem now plagues students on the school grounds. High profile cases are spotlighting the issue of cyberbullying. Now school leaders and policymakers are

becoming more aware of the seriousness of the issues that are consistently plaguing our school communities. The evolution has societal impact as well.

Many school leaders have no idea how to deal with the issue or conduct a proper investigation. While there is much research done on traditional bullying, very little exists specifically on cyberbullying. More education need to be done in order for policies to be more effective when it comes to the issues of cyberbullying coming over into the school community many school officials do not understand the policy and how to properly investigate the allegations that were stated. It is to their understanding that because the incident did not occur on school grounds, that it is not the responsibility of the school leaders to get involved.

Research has shown associations between bullying and the long-term effects experienced by the victims. Teenagers that have been exposed to bullying throughout school have reported problems with anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, absenteeism, and reduced school achievement (Hunt, Peters & Rapee, 2012). Gould (2007) has also identified suicidal behaviors as another strong stressor associated with bullying. Another researcher Kellam (2003) conducted research that concluded that boys that had experienced bullying during their elementary school years, were at a higher risk for being arrested as juveniles, developing conduct disorders, and antisocial personality disorders. Another study indicated that children that are bullied at about the age of eight are more likely to commit criminal offenses as an adult (Ayenibiowo & Akinbode, 2011). According to researcher Ronning (2009) frequent bullying behavior is an indicator of present and future psychopathology.

SECTION FIVE

Policy Implementation Policy

When it comes solving the issue of cyberbullying, there is no easy answer that will protect today's teens from their online experience, but there are steps that can be taken to help reduce negativity. The majority of teens do not feel that adults are capable of preventing or stopping cyberbullying from occurring. It is important that educators begin by communicating the awareness of the problem and a willingness to help if it does occur. Many schools feel that they can block all access to technology (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010). The problem of cyberbullying has become prevalent in the twenty-first century. According to Juvonen and Gross (2008), nearly 72% of teenagers have been victims of cyberbullying at some point and that it is so severe that as many as 95% of teenagers feel negative effects from the incidents of cyberbullying. Many of the effects that the victim experience include emotional and psychological disorders, low self-esteem, anxiety, being embarrassed, depression, decreased academic achievement, and potentially suicide (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010).

Social networking can affect students' behavior in their learning environment. According to the Feinberg and Robey (2008), cyberbullying events can undermine the school culture and functioning, as well as put some students at risk for mental health and safety problems. Having the ability to develop an effective cyberbullying program is a struggle for most school leaders. Another struggle that occurs is, the lack of reporting by the students who are witnessing these events occurring.

Needed educational activities

It is important to have a better understanding of cyberbullying and the effectiveness that it has on the learning environment. School leaders, parents, and community leaders can work more effectively to create a safer learning environment for all students. While most of these incidents occur elsewhere, it is difficult for school leaders. This is where more educational activities need to be developed in order to educate school leaders and teachers on how to properly deal with the issue, when it comes into the learning environment. Schools are supposed to be considered a safe place where learning takes place, but in today's society it is difficult for students to find safety in their learning environment because there is so much chaos taking place.

Cyberbullying is defined as "willingful and repeated harm that is inflicted through the use of computers, cell phones, and other electronic devices." This definition of cyberbullying should be used in all district and school documents in order for all to understand what cyberbullying is identified as.

Bandura (1973) stated that aggression is a learned behavior called social learning theory. When he conducted an experiment with children and a Bobo doll, the children first observed a model being aggressive with the doll, and then the children mimicked the behavior that they witnessed. According to Bandura (1977), people learn through observing others' behavior, be it positive or negative. School leaders and educators need to be able to understand that this behavior that students are exemplifying is something that was taught. Olweus (1993) agreed with the relationship of social learning theory and cyberbullying, because bullies' main objective is to gain dominance over their victims.

Staff development plan

School leaders as well as educators must understand that bullying is a form of internal and external factors that can contribute to mental, emotional, and physical changes within the individual. Other motives that contribute to this behavior of bullying are family background characteristics contributed to be modeled and reinforced by the aggressors' family role model. Learning experience is pivotally important in shaping peoples overall behavior and attitudes. School leaders and educators should be required to take a training about what researchers say about cyberbullying and the effects that it has on the educational environment. They have to understand that people behavior is directly related to and dictated by learning and social experiences attained by individuals. According to Solomon (2004), social learning theory is based on the principle that humans possess the ability to learn and to modify their behavior through observation. Social learning theory is divided into four prime stages: attention, retention, production, and motivation. Which is important for educators because they can engage the students into positive or negative behaviors. When educators understand the Social Learning Theory it allows them to better understand the consequences of cyberbullying for students who are victims. Educators need to be made aware that bullies often belong to popular groups, which not only gives them clout to get their way among students, but it also gives them power over other because others often aspire to the bullies positions (Thunfors & Cornell, 2008). Bullies often can often influence their victims into becoming bullies or being violent later on in their lives (Bender & Losel, 2011). The social learning theory provides a comprehensive insight and explanation through drawing on relevant models.

Educators need to understand Bandura's psychological theories of human development, in order to help tactic cyberbullying. They have to be aware that children learn to become violent when they are exposed to this type of behavior at an early age in life. Environment plays a part in the reaction of students. For example, when a child is exposed to violence at home, the child tends to display that type violent behavior. With Bandura's theory as a framework for staff development, it will help educators and school leaders understand how students in their school or class become bullies.

School leaders and educators have to understand that the issue of cyberbullying is a whole-school community issue. There is no single solution to preventing cyberbullying from happening, but there needs to be strategies in place to help develop an effective comprehensive prevention plan. There are five key areas that all schools need to address.

6. **Understanding and talking about cyberbullying-** The whole school community needs a shared agreement of what cyberbullying consist of? All school leaders and educators need to be aware of the impact of cyberbullying and the ways that it impacts the victims. The students and their parents should be aware of what the sanctions are if this occurs on the school property or causes a disruption to the learning environment. It should also be made aware to the parents and students that the school can provide them with some type of support if the incident of cyberbullying takes places outside of school.
7. **Updating existing policies and practices-** Review and update the school anti-bully policy, for example, (Acceptable Use Policies), the rules that the students have to agree to in order to use technology in the school. School leaders and educators must keep good records of any incidents of

cyberbullying. Be able to conduct searches of internet use records at school.

This may act as an effective consequence for bullies.

8. **Making reporting cyberbullying easier**-Provide a different way of reporting cyberbullying in schools, for example a student council taskforce can be formed, peer reporting, and anonymous reporting. No one should feel that they have to deal with cyberbullying alone, and reporting any incident of cyberbullying should be accessible.
9. **Promoting the positive use of technology**- Explore safe ways of using technology with students, in order to support positive self-esteem, assertiveness, and to develop positive friendships. Discuss e-safety and global literacy and show students that educators understand the technologies that they use.
10. **Evaluating the impact of prevention activities**- Regular reviews are essential to make sure that anti-bullying policies are working properly and are up-to-date. Conduct an annual survey of students' experiences of cyberbullying, and include a parent satisfaction survey. Getting data on how students and parents view the policies are important because it allows the school leader to see the pros and cons of the policy. While keeping it a flexible document

The whole school community has an important part to play in ensuring cyber safety. It is important to understand teen's online lives and activities to respond to situations appropriately and effectively. School leaders, educators, and parents need to

understand the technology lingo that teens are using because it will give them a better understanding of what they are saying.

Time schedules

In the beginning of the school year, school leaders must address a code of conduct rule. This code of conduct includes rules, procedures, and expectations made to staff, students, and parents in various manners. It is important that school leaders understand that they have a legal responsibility in regards to educating students and staff on the policies for bullying. Homeroom teachers should go through the code of conduct and policies with their students. Educators have an obligation to be proactive in their approach in going over the code of conduct and policies. They must hold class meetings in the beginning and end of the day, using informational videos where students are the actors. In order for school leaders and educators need to gain a positive rapport, they will have to understand the culture core values and norms that are represented in the school environment. School leader and educators need to have individual interviews with the students that are considered to be targets of cyberbullying, these group of individuals need to realize, that they can trust the adults that are within the school building.

During the first few weeks of school, the school leader needs to build a circle of trust, starting with the school staff. At this time a survey should be taken by the staff, in order for the school leader to gain understanding, and verify the staff's knowledge of cyberbullying. By gaining this knowledge from the survey, the school leader will know what professional needs are required, in order to train the staff about the awareness and how to prevent it.

Monthly Meeting and Partnership

According to many researchers, such as Hinduja and Patchin (2010), school leaders who enforce, listen, interact, and connect with parents, their staff, the student body, and the community are able to set the tone for the building. The actions of the school leader, is the one that can establish trust or distrust when it comes to situations especially cyberbullying investigations. Whether or not the school leader enforces consequences for breaking school and district policies, trust in the leadership is an important priority. Being able to establish meaningful relationships strengthens the culture of the building, while creating a positive school culture that is necessary among all stakeholders.

The establishment of a positive rapport with open communication, with parents and community about the issues of cyberbullying creates a win-win situation for all parties involved in the educational environment. Since technology will continue to advance, educational institutions need help from the community and the parents in order to protect the students. The community of stakeholders should use the issue of cyberbullying as an opportunity to teach students and their parents about the use of technology properly. Parents and community partners the parameters of what the local school and district can and cannot do. It is important that they are aware there is a lot that happens on the outside of the school that the educational institution cannot control. When cases of cyberbullying incidents are alleged parents should be invited in for the investigation process and allowed to review the cyberbullying messages. Parents need to be a part of the investigation process and have the chance to give any information on the investigation that might be helpful in coming to a resolution.

It is important that parents and community partners understand how cyberbullying is considered punishable when it causes a disruption within the learning environment. The district does not have a clearly stated policy. In the students code of conduct it states:

Refrain from making threats of violence, joking about violence or starting rumors of violence against the school, staff, or students. Such actions will be quickly and thoroughly investigated. Violations of the Code of School/ Classroom Conduct that are dangerous, disruptive or interfere with a teacher's ability to teach effectively **will not be tolerated**. (Milwaukee Public Schools Student Code of Conduct, 2015 p. 19).

There are 14 offenses mentioned under disruption of school, the last of which is bullying.

Community partners and parents have to understand that the Internet has changed the course of education and has impacted society in a yin yang type of way, meaning that with every positive there is a negative. Cyberbullying starts outside of the learning environment and leaks into the learning environment, and then it becomes a serious issue because of the disruption that it causes. Most of the time, school leaders do not treat things different unless they get the heads up from parents that something is going on. At that point school leaders notify the students that are involved that they are aware of the problem, but the school leader does not notify the educator that is in contact with all parties involved. This is problematic because if the educator has these students in class, the incident would continue to grow and other students, possible will get involved. All

stakeholders have to realize that, even though the issue started on the outside, that once it causes a disruption to the learning environment, it is now considered a school issue.

School leaders have several roles to play within the educational field they must be very knowledgeable and have to build relationships with parents, teachers, and educators, as well as have the ability to communicate expectations, be able to make difficult decisions, and have the ability to deal with discipline problems that involve students and parents. They have to be able to educate all stakeholders about the issues of cyberbullying. It is the school leaders' job to protect the students that they are servicing and their safety should be a top priority. Being reactive but being proactive and teaching prevention and safety is the key to helping prevent this from occurring in the school setting.

SECTION SIX

Policy Assessment Plan

School leaders play a pivotal in developing and implementing cyberbullying policies and in context, of other whole school and community efforts in order to promote a positive school climate. One role that school leaders have is teaching students how to be civil to one another, as well as promoting understanding and respect for diversity and difference. It is the responsibility of school leaders to stay up-to-date with current

research and ways of preventing incidents of cyberbullying from occurring in their school buildings. Which should be required in a professional development for all staff, which includes the school leader. Also, it is the school leader's responsibility to partner with other schools and community partners to develop and implement a plan to prevent cyberbullying from occurring.

The study of this policy will help to inform school leaders, educators, parents, and community partners about the disruption that cyberbullying causes in the learning environment and the importance to promote prevention activities. This study will help keep students safer because all stakeholders may recognize that most of the cyberbullying occurs at home or the community, but leaks into the learning environment, causing disruption. School leaders may benefit from being more aware of updated techniques in order to prevent cyberbullying of their student body. School districts and schools may mandate training for all their school leaders because cyberbullying has become the contemporary form of bullying and harassment. The goal for the training would be the indicators and the interventions so that the consequences shared with the students and their parents are consistent and effective. The training for the school leaders should be focused on procedures, investigations, consequences, and the follow-up for the involved parties of the cyberbullying incident and the victims. The training will be also keep educators aware of the signs, trends, and reporting procedural expectations of cyberbullying.

When schools have a relationship with the parents of the students that they are servicing, the implementation of parental agreements are easier learning environment could provide counseling or intervention to the bullies and their victims that would focus

on age appropriate behaviors and self-esteem issues. Educators could be of great help by being cognizant of the issues surrounding cyberbullying by sharing responsibility to help their students and make parents aware of any issues. It is important to create awareness of online activities, the dangers of no supervision. Victimization is real and it is not going away without interventions from educational institutions, community partners, and families. All schools throughout the school district should provide community and parent involvement nights throughout the school year, where they would share information on cyberbullying, the effects and preventions; as well as build relationships with community partners where they could discuss ways of how to fund a program to prevent cyberbullying. Building relationships among school leaders, educators, students, parents, and community partners are necessary in order to build a safe and positive school culture.

6. **Understanding and talking about cyberbullying** The schools need to create a forum, which should involve a school leader, at least parents from every grade level, educators from every grade level, two students from every grade level, and one community leader. This think tank would address the school community about considerations, data, and preventions that can be put into place to help decrease the issues of cyberbullying and the like.

- The school leader should create a survey to pass out to the team that will be a part of the forum.
- The survey will address the issues of cyberbullying. This survey is to make sure that everyone that is a part of the forum understands the indicators and effects of cyberbullying behavior.

- The school leader will analyze the survey, in order to make sure that the team is solid or if they need more training on understanding cyberbullying.
 - Discuss the findings with the team and develop an online survey for educators to take during the first days of school.
 - A professional development should be done during the first couple days of schools, in order to make sure that all staff is on the same page of understanding and being able to discuss cyberbullying within the classrooms.
7. **Updating existing policies and practices-** It is important that the school leader, school governance, and educator leader should do an annual audit on existing policies and procedures to decide what needs to be changed in order to include updated information about cyberbullying prevention and how to respond to the incidents.
- The team should review the current district and school policy on cyberbullying.
 - Review what the law states about cyberbullying and develop an effective policy.
 - Update the policy and make sure it's in welcome packages for students and parents to sign.
 - Make sure that the policy is also on the school web page and posted throughout the school building.

- Educators are expected to review the policy and make sure that their students understand, what cyberbullying is the effects, the consequences, and how to prevent it from happening.
 - Parents and students must sign the updated policy, to state that they understand.
8. **Making reporting cyberbullying easier-** Schools should be required to setup a cyberbullying taskforce that should be made up of a student from each grade level and a teacher advisor that most students in the school community can trust. This would help to identify what the problems are and help to develop a solution in conjunction with the teacher advisor.
- Create a web based form for students to report incidents of cyberbullying anonymously.
 - It is the school leader's responsibility to investigate the alleged incidents that are reported without bias.
 - The incidents will be documented, in order to review at a later date.
 - Collecting all necessary data will help to assess the outcome.
9. **Promoting the positive use of technology-** It is important to keep updated with the newest technologies that are being developed. This will help to prevent students from potential abuse and risk that may put them in danger. While young people are experts on their own about the use of technology, they may not necessarily understand all the risk involved and why it is important for them to understand how to protect their selves.

- Parent and student meetings in order to teach both students and their parents about positive use of technology.
- Both student and parent will sign the technology form stating that they understand the use of technology.
- Parents will have students' portal information and be able to check all necessary information access.
- Educators will continue to teach students about the importance of using technology positively. This should be done within the first 30 minutes of every day.
- This activity can be as a circle time activity (restorative justice).

10. Evaluating the impact of prevention activities- When tackling cyberbullying it is an ongoing process, and to get the most out of the prevention policy, it is vital to review all activities that is going on. Cyberbullying should be included in review processes and be included wherever appropriate in any new policies.

- Provide resources to help students and parents identify the consequences of cyberbullying.
- Monthly parent trainings for parents whom child has been accused of cyberbullying.
- Support for students whom have been victims of cyberbullying.

In order to assess and have an effective cyberbullying policy it is recommended that school leaders focus on communication when developing these policies. It is important to educate and enforce rules consistently during morning announcements may reduce cyberbullying incidents. School leaders and educational staff must document

cyberbullying incidents and notify students and parents of the situation that is occurring and what the consequences will be. School leaders and their team should establish weekly character campaigns of respect and responsibility and have a student announcer announce different character developments for the week. It is important that the character campaigns be posted around the school for all students, parents, and community partners to observe. A creation of student videos with students from the school showing appropriate online behavior should be established. School leaders should make sure to communicate with all parents of the students that would be involved in the video publications. Monthly parent informational meetings on cyberbullying and online computer usage should be offered. School leaders should keep cyberbullying on their monthly agenda for their district school meetings. Schools should have established collaboration time for the school team to meet to determine the disruption of the cyberbullying incidents within the school. Lastly, established professional development including educator training and school leader programs that focus on workshops and parent meeting to educate on the use of technology.

In order for it to be more effective several more procedures could be developed from the policy. The school leaders should create a behavior support for bullies and the victims to build their self-esteem. By creating this support group, it will allow all parties get the necessary help that they will need, in order to resolve the issues. A program should be created of peer mentors who would work with students to resolve conflicts that are caused by cyberbullying. Students seem to learn better from their peers; especially, students that are considered to be positive leaders. A link on the school website should

be created to report cyberbullying incidents that emerge and offer a tip line to report incidents of cyberbullying.

SECTION SEVEN

Summary Impact Statement

This policy addresses problems of cyberbullying that is taking place in the middle schools and the need for students to be educated. The design and implementation of the cyberbullying prevention program needs to be implemented, in middle and high school in order to address the need for parent education and students about cyberbullying anew methods to deter it. There needs to be a unified front between school, community, and home to combat the issue of cyberbullying. The mission is to provide middle schools with a program that can assist with the needs of the parents, schools, and community.

Being able to develop an effective cyberbullying program is definitely a struggle for most school leaders since many of the behaviors occur off of school grounds and not during school hours. An additional struggle is the fact that many students who witness incidents of cyberbullying, refuse to report it. According to Hinduja and Patchin (2008), research shows that somewhere between 10-15 % of students who are considered victims of cyberbullying actually report their incidents to an adult at the school. However, because many of these incidents of cyberbullying, occurs off school grounds, are resolved many times at school, with makes the issue extremely relevant to the school and the school leader.

Many schools want to relate cyberbullying as a new issue that has arrived, but it is a phenomenon that has evolved and is embedded in traditional bullying. There have been many examples of the devastating effects of cyberbullying left uninvestigated and has inflicted thousands of victims. Stories of Ryan Patrick Halligan (ABC News, 2003) are becoming more and more common as time progresses whether major or minor the effects cyberbullying are extremely powerful, many children believe the only way that they can cope, is to take their own lives. Instead of school leaders and educators doing business as usual, quality school leaders and educators should be worried about the student as a whole. This means that if students are being affected by incidents of cyberbullying, it is their problem to help prevent and address it.

The education of students are very important in the twenty-first century, but education comes in many different forms. There is a pivotal need to teach students about the effects of cyberbullying and how to respond to cyberbullying incidents, but it takes a school leader and educators, that do not have a problem developing a better quality policy, to address the concerns of cyberbullying. Students need to be more aware of the policies concerning cyberbullying, as well as their parents. There should be no more business as usual when children are feeling that their only way out, is to bring harm to themselves. It is the job of school leaders to take proactive measures when addressing this concern.

Students have the right to go to school with the confidences that they are safe. Bullying has always been done in schools throughout the ages, but cyberbullying adds another dimension to the torture that perpetrators can inflict in advancing technology. The job of school leaders, educators, and all other stakeholders are very complex in

today's society. Educators cannot just teach the curriculum that is set for them to teach. Now they have to worry about accountability and test scores. They are expected to provide quality education to all students, are given solutions to dealing with students who are bullied online.

School leaders have a difficult job in today's society, human dynamics is a complex science. They are required to move the school forward, but are challenged with students who do not feel secure and safe. Chaos arise during non-school hours and days. The chaos causes a great disruption in the learning environment, which adds an additional burden to their job.

What Happens Next?

Approximately 93% of cyberbullying victims have felt negative effects, when experiencing issues of being cyberbullied, which includes thoughts of suicide (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008). According to Ybarra and Mitchell (2004), most school leaders are looking at making Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) instead of looking at the conditions that are happening emotionally with their student body, such as an increase of substance abuse and the students' unfavorable attitude towards attending school. These facts should be enough to convince school leaders that they must take a proactive approach to handling the issue of cyberbullying seriously. It is reported by Ybarra (2007) that students that have experienced cyberbullying are likely to carry a weapon to school within the first 30 days of their experience.

If every child that enters the school building feels safe and secure, then every educator has the obligation to take action to keep those students safe and secure. With the takeover of social networking in the past few years, cyberbullying is now an issue that

educator just simply ignore it must be acknowledged as a primary concern when evaluating threats of harm. Policies are made to be followed, but planning and evaluating are equally important. Being proactive when it comes to this issue is pertinent and children are not feeling safe because of this issue.

It is important to understand that technology is changing at a rapid speed and it is very difficult to keep up with the changing times. A school leader who has an excellent cyberbullying policy in effect, but fails to consistently evaluate the policy for effectiveness will most likely have an outdated and ineffective policy that does not work for this current time period. An evaluation of effective cyberbullying policies cannot be summative. It needs to continue to be an ongoing practice in order to remain relevant of the current times.

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Appendix A

Focus Group Questions

1. What is your understanding of culturally relevant literature/teaching?
2. How do you make sure that what the students are reading in the Collection Series, connect to their lives?
3. Do the Collection Series stories encourage students connect to connect to what they are reading?
4. What do you think makes a book/ story culturally relevant?
5. What does the term cultural mean to you?
6. Do you read any professional journals or literature about making teaching and learning culturally relevant or about teaching literature to African American students?
7. What are real life experiences?
8. How would you define academic success?
9. What makes teaching culturally relevant?
10. Would you say the Collections Series is more culturally relevant or less culturally relevant than other reading series you have used?

Appendix B

Journaling Questions

- Please be very detailed in your responses

1. How many years have you been teaching this grade and subject?
2. Describe what you think about the titled Collection 2 lessons. Explain in detail if these Collections represent cultural relevant literature.
3. How would you personal define cultural relevance?
4. Does the authors in the Collections Series reflect a culturally conscious?
5. Are the cultural identities and values validated?
6. Could the events experienced happen to the students within your class?
7. Does the title reflect the culture of the identified students?
8. How would you explain the racial makeup of your grade level?
9. What is your understanding of culturally relevant teaching?
10. What are five important things that you do in your teaching, in order to make your literature lessons culturally relevant?
11. Do you allow the students to use real life experiences in their daily learning?
12. How would you explain lived experiences?
13. How would you categorize the type of classroom in which you are teaching?

